How to Think Clearly in an Age of Distraction | Sam Harris

Perform with Dr. Andy Galpin · Episode 26 · May 27, 2026 · Transcript

Sam Harris
Mindfulness is, to talk about the style of meditation I tend to recommend, is just an ability to step back and notice thoughts as thoughts, as appearances in the mind. Perhaps only for brief moments, in the beginning to break the connection between the anxious thought and the physiology of anxiety.

Dr. Andy Galpin
The science and practice of enhancing human performance for sport, play, and life. Welcome to Perform. I'm Dr. Andy Galpin, I'm a professor and scientist and the executive director of the Human Performance Center at Parker University. Today, I'm speaking with Dr. Sam Harris. Sam has a PhD in neuroscience, an extensive background in philosophy, and has spent over 20 years as a public intellect. In today's show, we talk a lot about critical thinking, logic, and reason.

We also get into Sam's current position on artificial intelligence and how that is impacting us in the short-term, as well as in the long-term. We also spent a lot of time talking about mindfulness and other tools and practices that you can use to have more control over both your emotions and logic. I know I personally picked up many things from our conversation that are going to help me in my thinking processes to be more decisive, to be more clear, to be more articulate, and to overall feel like I'm communicating more effectively as both someone speaking to the world, as well as someone who wants to listen and be more effective at those tools.

So with that in mind, please enjoy today's conversation with Dr. Sam Harris. Dr. Sam Harris, it's great to have you in here.

Sam Harris
Great to meet you. Yeah. Thank you.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I'm really interested in taking this conversation in a particular direction that I haven't seen you get the opportunity to spend as much time in recently, and that is thinking. And I know you cover a ton of topics, but given the fact that you've got terminal degrees in neuroscience, at least a graduate degree in philosophy or--

Sam Harris
Undergraduate

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
Undergraduate philosophy, and you've spent at the same time, much of your career helping people directly via your app or your teachings on meditation and whatnot. So you have this triangle of academic knowledge and kind of this intersection between the brain and the mind, as well as putting this into practice, how do we actually help people. And it's my opinion that right now, the world needs some help in thinking. And I think you're the perfect person to ask these set of questions with. So I want to actually start with what I hope is a simple question. And you can lay some groundwork and then we can dive in as far as possible.

Sam Harris
Sure.

Dr. Andy Galpin
What's the difference between being smart and being intelligent?

Sam Harris
Well, I think we tend to use those more or less interchangeably. I mean, intelligence is really just a capacity to solve problems and meet various goals. And general intelligence manages to do that across a functionally unlimited range of environments. Where learning in one space doesn't degrade your learning in another. So obviously, now we're talking a lot about the search for artificial general intelligence, which many of us are worried about.

There's the possibility, even certainty that if we build it, we will have built something that is more powerful than we are ultimately, because it can solve the same sorts of goals faster and can solve problems that we can't solve on our own. So if the thing is not aligned with our interests, in the end, many of us get very worried about that picture or that relationship really. Analogous to meeting aliens from outer space that come and demonstrate by their mere arrival that they're smarter than we are.

I think smartness might-- in the way we use it commonly, might imply at least a dose of common sense or wisdom. So there are many very intelligent people who are just-- who are obviously not wise. I mean, they haven't figured out how to live good lives. They suffer in all kinds of unnecessary ways, and they produce lots of suffering that we hope they regret, and we certainly are not fans of.

So there's no direct link between sheer brain power with respect to solving problems and meeting goals and the wisdom that allows you to pick the right problems to solve and the right goals to orient toward. So, if that's what you're after, I think, you could fold into the concept of being smart, some kind of common sense or wisdom.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
The reason I want to start there was I got to imagine anyone listening if we said, would you like to be smarter or more intelligent, every hand would go up. Much like if I asked the same thing of if you want to be stronger or more fit, I mean, who doesn't want that? But it's difficult for us to provide tools and strategies and tactics for that when we actually struggle to understand what that means.

And I feel like most people have a better sense of saying, if I helped you gain more muscle, you know what that means. But what's it mean to be smarter? What's it mean to be more intelligent? And if we can understand that, then maybe we can have a discussion about which specific tactics help on which specific aptitudes.

Sam Harris
I should also note-- I don't know if we want to go there, but smartness, intelligence, wisdom, these are qualities that are really taboo to assess. It's totally uncontroversial to say that one person is stronger than another. I mean, you can measure it and you can demonstrate it. You can't lie to yourself about it, or you can only lie so long. This is also true with intelligence in any domain that we can quantify it. And yet it's on some level, we get very uncomfortable saying that and thinking that about ourselves and about other people.

It's a little bit like talking about beauty, which is harder to quantify. But we just know empirically that you could get 100% consensus on Brad Pitt being more handsome than me or some other guy. And we understand the variables that account for that. I mean, facial symmetry-- nobody-- we you can price in as much influence of culture as you want, but there's no culture ever found that it prizes radical asymmetry, bilateral asymmetry. In any case, people get uncomfortable in talking about differences in intelligence.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Actually, that's exactly where I want to go. I'll use a model quite often that I call the three Is. So the first I is investigate, the second I is interpret, and the third I is intervene, which is a fancy way of saying if I want to be more intelligent, the first thing I have to figure out is, how do I even measure that? Then, how do I interpret those results? And then, what do I do about it? So this is a perfect lead in. So with that said, tell me more about the intelligence. How are we defining it scientifically? Is that different from how we do it locally? And does that difference matter?

Sam Harris
Well, there is a narrow definition of intelligence that people are especially uncomfortable with, which is IQ. As far as what we've psychometrically assessed, that is the-- that's the center of the bull's eye. Most of the literature on multiple intelligences has, I think-- I'm not super close to this, but I think the conclusion is this is a politically correct gloss on other human abilities that we are

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

simply calling intelligence but they're not-- athletic intelligence, I mean, you can call it intelligence, but it's certainly a skill. But to call it intelligence in the way that we use that term in other contexts just seems like it's more politics than it is psychometrics.

And so it is with musical intelligence. I mean, there's a range of human abilities that we find valuable, that we find admirable in others, that we seek to cultivate in ourselves. I have basically no musical ability. I'm nearly 60 and I haven't found it, so it's probably not there. I noticed this in other people. I don't have it. It's not taboo to say that about myself. I don't feel radically diminished as a person. I'm not embarrassed.

But if I said to you, listen, I'm just not smart, that's all of a sudden a weird self-concept confession. You'd think, OK, that sounds like a real problem, but it's not true with strength in the gym or, I can't dunk a basketball. So it is so. But we just have to grow up and realize there is a bell curve put across almost every human trait that varies in the population. And any trait we care about sufficiently, we figure out how to measure.

I mean, there are things we haven't measured like sense of humor, but presumably we could operationalize that. I mean, we know what it's like for somebody to be really funny. I mean, somebody who can stand up in front of a room and get laughs every six seconds for a full hour, we call those people stand up comics. And somebody could figure out how to quantify that, right?

But even in the absence of quantification, it is something that we have discovered about ourselves that human beings range in their aptitude for. And some things are trainable, some things aren't, some things are trainable to an extraordinary degree, which is to say, genetics is really not much of the story there. And I actually think sense of humor is one where the genetic component, if it exists, I don't think is significant.

But intelligence, like much of-- certainly IQ, like much of what we care about in people, seems to be a story of something like 50% heritability. So it's, 50% is, how wisely you picked your parents and the other 50% is, the kind of life you've had and what you've paid attention to. And what has-- whether you got hit in the head, riding your bicycle, et cetera.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I'll fill in some blanks on your behalf that I know you've said 1,000 times, but I'll say it for you so you don't have to repeat yourself. Intelligence can be defined in many ways, which you just laid out a good case for that. The IQ test is one example of that, but we're all acknowledging that's not the only or even best way to do so.

It would take a long time to go through all the different ways to measure intelligence, but I guess my next question then is, is intelligence the goal that people actually are after, or are they maybe

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

using the wrong language here? Is there a different thing that we should be aimed at rather than intelligence? And if it is intelligence and you said it briefly, there's some parts that are trainable and some that are not, any examples are the ones that are trainable?

Sam Harris
Well, before we talk about trainability, certain kinds of intelligence are becoming-- again, I wasn't expecting to talk about AI, but it's just so omnipresent now that it's unavoidable. But for this conversation, it's relevant because certain kinds of intelligence are so readily outsourced now that they're becoming less and less valuable to us. Literally no one is admonishing people to learn to code at this point. This is just not a thing. And that's never coming back, right?

I mean, there are things that are like chess where once the machines are the best in the world at that thing, they're always going to be the best in the world at that thing. And we're never going to say that-- again, we're never going to say again that the best chess player on Earth is a person. It's just not going to happen. Not even close. And so we're all going to be integrated with these tools to some degree in how vastly we use them.

And I think the, the value placed on being able to have a lot of facts in your-- the wetware of your brain is going to diminish because, just a second from now, you can pull out your phone and have just a digest of facts on any topic under the sun. So it'll be interesting to see how our sense of self-esteem and what is-- and what we value in others begins to get pushed around by technology. I mean, I just think it's-- I think some things are going to be durable and I can't see us outgrowing them.

But some things are I think will be-- they just won't-- it won't be the direct route to high status the way you might think, in the same way that being physically strong-- you can imagine 500 years ago, was a direct-- I mean, you were the leader of the village if you were the guy who could pick up any other guy and slam him on the ground. At a minimum, everyone wanted to pay you the necessary respect.

Dr. Andy Galpin
It was selection pressure at that point. Not anymore.

Sam Harris
I mean that changed obviously as we grew more civilized and-- Yeah, so I think a lot of this is up for grabs and things might be trainable in ways that we've yet to discover. And certainly with respect to pharmacology. I mean, smart drugs have not really delivered on that phrase as much as we would hope, but--

Dr. Andy Galpin
Nor have genetics.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Sam Harris
Yeah, but who knows? But I think it's-- I mean, certainly, the literature would tell you that raw verbal and mathematical intelligence isn't-- it's trainable in the sense that you can access the full range of your genetic gifts or fail to do that. If you never receive any education, well, you never become literate. You never learn to read, well, then you could have been Shakespeare, but-- and mom never taught you to read. So her bad.

But I think that it's still believed that everyone has a genetic ceiling in the same way that we do athletically. I mean, I was not going to be LeBron James for a variety of reasons. I was not going to be Alan Turing for the very similar reasons.

Dr. Andy Galpin
The presenting sponsor of this podcast is Momentous. Momentous makes the highest quality supplements on the market, period. I literally spent years vetting their products, company and leadership team before officially partnering with them in 2023. Every single one of Momentous' products is third-party tested to ensure quality, and many are even NSF certified for sport.

Now, while I love all their products, I'm incredibly excited about their new fiber plus prebiotic. Almost everyone is seeking more energy, improved recovery, and better performance, but most people are missing a key foundation to their overall health, and that's getting enough good fiber. In fact, 95% of Americans are failing to hit the recommended daily amount of fiber.

Fiber powers gut health, which we know drives long-term performance. Proper gut health allows for better nutrient absorption, energy stability, recovery, inflammation control, and much more. I personally simply mix a scoop with their cinnamon flavor and some water every night, and by doing so, I make sure I'm covering any gaps I might have in my daily fiber intake that I try to get through eating a balanced, whole food diet.

If you'd like to try fiber plus or any of Momentous' best in class supplements, just go to livemomentous.com/galpin and use the code Galpin for up to 35% off your first order. Again, that's livemomentous.com/galpin and use the code Galpin for up to 35% off your first order.

Humans have never been particularly good at facts. Memory, that's why we developed writing in the first place, right? First writings weren't stories. They were accounting and things like that. So I don't feel like it's a particularly large problem that we're going to start to outsource that even more. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Are there certain cognitive capacities that we're obviously going to lose that you're OK with or not OK with?

Sam Harris
Well, I think certain technology is cognitively competitive with us. And then there's other technology that is cognitively enhancing. And this is actually a distinction that the biologist David

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Krakauer at the Santa Fe Institute has made and talked a lot about. The classic example, albeit one that doesn't really matter to most of us, is there's-- a clear cognitive enhancement is something like the abacus. I mean, you can learn to do an abacus, and people who get good at it apparently can actually do it in their mind.

So they can do calculations that somebody couldn't do before because they've internalized this methodology, which was-- which is just a physical tool. Whereas when you think of our relationship to something like the GPS on our phone, now many of us are having the experience of, if you ever had a good sense of direction, it's been a long time since you've used it. And you might be in some foreign city and you've walked away from your hotel and you realize you-- but for your phone, you've made so little effort to track where you've wandered in the town that you just have no idea how to get back to the hotel.

I think we're losing a certain kind of cognitive muscle tone based on our use of certain tools. Whether that matters or not, I don't know. I mean, I think on balance, we're all benefiting from the GPS on our phones. Basically, no one is-- virtually no one is ever getting lost again. We could-- certainly, the way AI is being deployed and people are using it to write and to-- it's like-- I'm a writer. The temptation to have AI produce a first draft of the thing that I now want to work on, I could see that being, you know, cognitively competitive in a way that's not great, because part of-- what is good about writing isn't just the final product. It's actually taking the time to think through what you think.

And in fact, discover what you think over the course of confronting a blank page and actually writing. So, I'm using the tools still somewhat circumspectly, but for research-- leaving aside the hallucination problem and some other things that we know about and those loopholes are getting clothed presumably, it is just amazing to be able-- I mean, you can do a week's worth of research in an hour. And I think that is more or less all to the good. I think it's just a very mixed story how the technology is going to change us.

Dr. Andy Galpin
You mentioned really quickly you like the fact that physically writing even the first draft is not necessarily going to make the end paper better or the essay or anything, but it's a practice in thinking. Are you concerned at all that we're circumventing that?

Sam Harris
Yeah. Most people don't write much at all. So it's not that most people are going to notice a difference. It's just it's really people who have this tool really ingrained in their lives. I mean, it was said of writing that it was going to diminish human memory, right? People were worried about that 2,500 years ago. So I'm not worried about it.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

I'm worried much more that are just engagement with the breaking or social connection more and more and the fact that we're all directing our attention into this kind of experience machine. I mean, we're all migrating into the matrix without actually being directly jacked into there because we're just staring at screens so much of the time, and other people's thoughts.

I think listening to audio is a great thing to do, but when you're listening to audio, other people's thoughts are just populating your own stream of thought. So it is now true to say that virtually no one is ever left alone with their thoughts, unless they want to be. Boredom is not a thing anymore. Nothing is boring. We have canceled boredom because there's always an infinite amount of information to pay attention to.

And again, I do think that the trade off is generally good. But what is lost there? I mean, when we talk about meditation, we can talk about really what is lost there. But the confrontation with boredom has been existentially useful for so many generations of people because there, you recognize there's this undercurrent of very discursive dissatisfaction that is driving you in everything you do.

I mean, you're spending your virtually every waking moment talking to yourself. And most people, the inner noise is so incessant that most people don't even notice it. It's just white noise. But you wake up in the morning, you're chased out of bed by your thoughts and you're thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking every moment throughout the day. And now this is also in marriage with all of this information landscape, however you're sampling it, whether it's social media or the work you're doing or the podcast you're listening to or whatever.

But still, this conversation continues. I mean, everyone who's listening to us now has a voice in their head that is competing with this conversation, which is distracting them. I mean, the classic experience that everyone's had is you've sat down to read a book and you read a page and you get to the bottom of the page and you realize you have no idea what you just read. Your eyes just blindly scanned 400 words of text.

But you were talking to yourself. You were thinking about that thing that happened yesterday, or the lunch you're going to have later. Or what did she mean when she said that? I'm not self-absorbed. How could you say that? And there's this voice in your head. There's the I and the me are keeping each other company. And it's a very strange cognitive structure because we talk to ourselves as though there are two of us. If you're the one to think the thought and you're the one to receive it, why do you bother to think it in the first place? It's just there's something scarcely sane about it.

And the difference between someone who's normally neurotic and, and perpetually distracted and someone who's clearly insane, really, is the gating function is at the mouth. I mean, the

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

people who are insane are the people who can't help just externalizing their internal speech, and they're just obviously talking to someone who's not there.

And most of us know to keep our mouths shut, but we're still talking and, basically, pulverizing our moment to moment experience with concepts and judgments and reactions that are both linguistically mediated. And many people think a lot in images and so there's a stream of images and also just the emotional reactions that get brought forth by all of that.

I mean, you think this thought of regret or disappointment or envy or self-criticism or judgment of others, and that feels a certain way. That has an emotional tone and it can be felt in the body, and that feeling in the body becomes generative of further thoughts along those lines. And so you get this sort of positive feedback loop. And that's the story of our lives until we break that spell with meditation.

And so to come back to where we started here, the thing that many people never confront now, which everyone confronted just a generation ago, is the experience of being alone in a room with your thoughts. I mean, you'd go to the dentist. You're sitting in the waiting room for 45 minutes, you've got a bunch of bad magazines you don't want to read, and you're just sitting there bored.

What you discover in meditation is that boredom really is just a failure to pay attention, because there's nothing that's intrinsically boring. I mean, if you can sit alone in a room and just pay attention to your breath and have that become the most interesting thing in the world, which in fact, you can do when you learn to meditate, nothing can be boring. But until you discover that this failure to connect with experience in a way that is satisfying can become incredibly painful for people. I mean, boredom is really a dreaded experience and that's why none of us are ever having it.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I feel like when we hear and discuss boredom, we get a little bit of that. Well, sure, you're just complaining about the old times being better. Back in my day, we were bored. And now these kids these days don't have boredom. I think you really laid out a nice case there of, it's not that. There's a legitimate physiological and human problem with not being bored.

It's not a case of us just saying, we had it harder back when we were kids and you're soft now. How much is lack of thought clarity? How much is maybe I feel like I've got ADD or my attention is not there? Is that versus actually you're just-- there's not a skill problem here. There's not much of a cognitive skill problem as there is actually a distraction issue. Maybe it was a poor way to get into that question, but--

Sam Harris
Well, it's an intentional problem. I mean, here's a way to sharpen it up. If I asked virtually

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

anyone, I mean, anyone who doesn't happen to be an expert meditator to pay attention to anything for the next 30 seconds. I mean, anyone listening to us now can try this. You can pause the podcast and just try to pay attention to anything, the site outside your window, or the sounds in your environment or the feeling of breathing.

Anything you want to pay attention to in your experience for 30 seconds without getting lost in thought? No one can do it. And I mean, this is a very precise claim. You couldn't do it if your life depended on it. You couldn't do it if the lives of your children depended on it, you couldn't do it. Many people will think. Many people will try this and they'll think they succeeded.

And for those people, again, leaving aside some meditational prodigy or someone who's really trained their attention in the requisite ways, some number of people will think they've done it because they're so distracted they can't even functionally attempt the exercise. I mean, they'll sit there and they'll be thinking for every second and they'll be thinking thoughts like, what is he talking about? I'm paying attention. I can look at that cup and I'm not distracted.

But this voice in the head just feels like them and there's no space around it. They don't notice that thoughts are just these appearances that are arising in conscious awareness and that there's a context for them. There's a moment before they arise when the next thought hasn't arisen yet, and there's this open condition of awareness that's the same space in which all of your other experiences appear in all the sights, sounds, sensations.

And first, there's a moment where it hasn't arisen, and then it appears and then it disappears. And you can't see any of that because you're identified with each thought that it just feels like me. So someone's listening to me now and they're thinking, well, what is he talking about? Is this Buddhism? And it's that feeling of being the thinker is very much the sense of being, of what it is to feel like a self in the middle of experience, appropriating the experience.

And that is the thing that when you learn to pay attention, you can begin to deconstruct. Because you notice that thoughts are just appearing in consciousness very much the way that the sound of my words are appearing in consciousness to anyone who's listening to us. But because that is so incessant and no one has broken that, most people haven't broken that spell until they learn to meditate, to pay attention to anything for 30 seconds undistracted is just not on the menu. I mean, it's just not going to happen.

And one, that should just be interesting. I mean, that's a very weird status quo to think that, OK, if my life depended on it, I could not be undistracted for 30 seconds. But two, that is the mechanics of our suffering, our psychological suffering moment to moment. That is the thing that is producing-- that is condemning you to feel however the next thought in your head suggests you should feel.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

So the next time you think the thought that is making you anxious about the medical procedure you have to have next week, or the presentation you have to do at work, or that makes you feel unhappy about your relationship, whatever it is, this next thought, if it's a thought that produces anger, you are going to be condemned to be as angry as you're going to be because you're thinking that thought and you see no alternative.

So what mindfulness is to talk about the style of meditation I tend to recommend, is just an ability to step back and notice thoughts as thoughts, as appearances in the mind, along with everything else that's sights and sounds and sensations. And to perhaps only for brief moments in the beginning, to break the connection between the anxious thought and the physiology of anxiety that is going to seem like now in an emotional and behavioral imperative in the next moment.

So you think the thought that's making you anxious. Now you feel anxious, that's a problem. And now you're busy trying to figure out how to change the world so that you don't have to feel anxious anymore. Whereas mindfulness just allows you to notice the thought, notice the physiology. If it got kindled by the thought, not being noticed a moment before. And to notice that there's space around both. There's this condition of awareness in which both of those, those things are appearing.

And awareness itself isn't identical. It's not really captive of the thought or the physiology. It's like the screen on which the movie is being projected. And it really, on some level, it doesn't matter how beautiful or ugly the movie is, the screen is imperturbable on some level. You can begin to notice that about your own awareness. And that really is the direction, which the much celebrated freedom that is there to be experienced in meditation is to be found.

I mean, you're not producing some blissful state that is going to be transitory that is this drug like detachment from your life, although you can have experiences like that. More importantly, you're experiencing that awareness itself. I mean, just the sheer cognition that is at the bottom of every moment of conscious experience is, on some level, free of confinement to any experience so that the thing that's aware of joy is the same thing that's aware of anxiety.

And if you keep dropping back into that, you begin to feel a tranquility and a freedom which is always with you. I mean, it's always identical to the condition in which experience is appearing. And so it becomes psychologically normative and just a profound relief, frankly, to drop back into that, to be able to punctuate your moment to moment entanglement with the world and your emotional reaction to the world with these clear moments of freedom.

And so, yeah, we can talk more about that. But that's the direction in which all of this is, is pointing. It's not about changing experience. It's about recognizing that experience always has a context. And the context is free of the contraction that you're bringing to experience in each

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

moment.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Are there any ways people can enhance that part? It's not necessarily changing the thought that comes up. It's rather being better at acknowledging it or recognizing it's there. Is that a fair way to think about that, or would you adjust that?

Sam Harris
Well, actually, there are three things that are possible here. I mean, you can actually develop there's the sheer power of concentration such that you can pay attention in a very one-pointed way, and you can pay such close attention that thoughts are no longer arising. I mean, and there are some very sophisticated methodologies in training attention, but mostly in the Buddhist tradition, but not exclusively.

And you can become one-pointed and that becomes a very drug like tour of subtlety of mind. I mean, it's very psychedelic. It's very visionary, very blissful. I mean, there's a lot that happens when you're no longer distracted by thought for any significant period of time. But all of it is transitory in the sense that those states of mind are predicated on you doing this thing now.

You're now going to focus to the exclusion of, I'm going to focus on the breath or focus on an inner light or the sound of a mantra. I mean, the objects are really arbitrary, but focus on one thing, and I'm going to do it in such a sustained way that everything else is going to more or less disappear. You can't live your life that way and you wouldn't want to because there's just more to life than that.

And you need thought. You need to be able to think thoughts. You need to be able to figure out what you're going to do later in the day. And linguistic thought is the way you do that. So thoughts from the deepest perspective in meditation, thoughts are not the enemy. I mean, you're not trying to suppress thought, and any ability to suppress thought really is something you do just for a short period of time.

What you need for this second wisdom type of meditation is which mindfulness is purposed toward, is a modicum of concentration. It doesn't have to be so high that you can just pay attention to a single thing and literally everything else disappears. But you need to be able to tell the difference between making clear contact with a moment of experience, a sight, a sound, a sensation, even a thought, and being lost in thought. Which is to say, thinking without knowing that you're thinking, being identified with thought.

Because that state of being identified with thought, being this phrase identified with thought is took as Buddhist jargon and may be confusing to people. But it's this sense of you are thinking, your mind is totally trimmed down by whatever thought is present and you're not aware of that.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

You don't recognize the thought itself as an appearance.

And this is quite analogous to being asleep and dreaming and not knowing that you're dreaming. And yet when you think about what that's like, we all go to sleep every night. We're safely in our beds. We turn out the light, however long it takes us to fall asleep. There's some phase transition where we find ourselves in some other circumstance.

And unless it's a lucid dream, which some people have and this is a fun but rare experience. What is so surprising about the dream state is our lack of surprise when it arises. So you're in bed. And then all of a sudden, you're somewhere else, confronted by people. The people that may be famous, they may be dead, they may be totally imaginary but your mind doesn't even blink.

I mean, there's so little reality testing happening in your frontal cortex in this state of sleep that you'll accept anything as real. The suspension of the laws of physics. I mean, it doesn't matter. You're now with a gorilla. I mean, like, nothing is strange enough to provoke your sense that, OK, wait a minute. Something isn't right. I was in my bed, and now I'm here, and there's none of this makes sense.

Our thoughts are like that. I mean, are just ordinary thoughts. I mean, you're just sitting in your car driving and rehearsing a conversation you had with your friend or your colleague or your wife, and it's beginning to color your emotional life. I mean, you're uncomfortable because you asked for a raise and your boss didn't immediately say yes. I mean, did you ask the wrong way? And when's he going to get back to you?

And you're thinking these thoughts. You're beginning to feel miserable. You're not aware of any of this. Your boss isn't there. A thought about your boss is not your boss. Who are you talking to? This is all just a movie that's playing in your head and you're not aware of it, and it is completely defining your life. It's possible to pay such close attention that you just don't have thoughts, but that's a temporary drug like experience, though an interesting ability to cultivate.

It's possible to be mindful in ways that are stable enough so that a thought that would otherwise provoke anxiety or fear or anger or depression can arise and it has no implication. It's like a train you didn't get on. There's an image in Tibetan Buddhism of a certain stage of practice where thoughts are like thieves entering an empty house. And as you just imagine, it's like the thieves come rushing in but there is nothing to steal.

There's no implication to their presence. It's not like you kept the thieves out of the house but there's nothing in the house. So it's fine. So you can experience that through mindfulness. Your thought of self-hatred when it would normally ruin your next moment, and however many

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

moments thereafter, can have no more implication for you than my expressing the same language now and you happen to overhear it.

If I say, why am I such a screw up? That language, if it comes in the voice of your mind surreptitiously, and you have no perspective on it, virtually everyone's going to feel suddenly the collapse of their physiology and their emotional life and all of the implications. I mean, the next thought is going to be about doubts about your marriage and doubts like how does this person see me? Again, it's a plunge into something that's very much like a dreamscape.

But there's a third possibility, which is not a technique of meditation, but it's more like cognitive behavioral therapy or stoicism or a kind of applied philosophy, and that is just to think better thoughts. You can actually craft thoughts that are more useful. So you can reframe experiences, and all of that's very powerful.

And mindfulness becomes an aid to that because mindfulness allows you to notice the ordinary rut of mediocrity and self-talk that you got into. And then you can decide to just give it space and just let go of it, or you can actually decide to perform a little psychic surgery by consciously thinking different thoughts. And I'm a very big fan of stoic philosophy and cognitive reframing, and I think they're very powerful.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Today's episode is sponsored by David. David makes protein bars unlike any I have ever encountered. They have an amazing 28 grams of protein, only 150 calories, and 0 grams of sugar. That's right, 28 grams of protein and 75% of its calories come from that protein. This is 50% higher than the next closest protein bar. Honestly, it's the best tasting bar I've ever had in my life by a mile. And their newest bar, the David Bronze Bar, tastes incredible as well.

While I often talk about the importance of getting 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight for things like muscle health and recovery and the promotion of lean body mass and satiety, the reality of that is, for most people, getting that 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight is really challenging. However, David makes that easy. Their bars taste incredible. The gold bar is packed with 28 grams of protein with just 150 calories, and the bronze bar has 20 grams of protein, also, with just 150 calories.

I eat one almost every single day and always have two or three with me in my backpack when I'm traveling, and I literally mean always. It probably sounds funny, but I eat them as dessert all the time. When you try them, you'll know exactly what I mean. If you're interested in trying these bars for yourself, you can go to davidprotein.com/perform. Again, that's davidprotein.com/perform.

So if someone wanted an entry point into step two and step three, we'll pick any example, you

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

want here. But ones that are clearly on the rise are things like anxiety. This piggybacks directly on the boredom issue and we can tie together that knot if you want, why lack of boredom is actually causing tremendous amount of anxiety.

But in reality, how would someone, as an entry point say, OK, I'm bored out a little bit? I have these thoughts that are arising. I get it now a little bit that I'm not in full control of those, but two and three sound interesting. What's the easiest entry point you can think of without hiring a therapist or someone else for part three?

Sam Harris
The app we've built, Waking Up, is my best attempt to provide that entry point. I mean, I wrote a book by the same title, which is, people still find valuable and it really gives my personal. It's my contemplative memoir and it's how I got into meditation and how I think it fits into just a rational worldview at this point.

But an app is just a much better technology to deliver meditation instruction. I mean, specifically just all guided meditations in audio. I mean, you don't need the video. In fact, I'm not even sure the video would help. There's something intimate about just having audio in your ear rather than the moment you're watching, effectively, a television show, you become distracted by the visuals of it all. And yeah, it's just the perfect technology.

And there's a lot of guidance around mindfulness practice and different stages of that. And also there are many other teachers on it, and some are teachers of stoicism and cognitive behavioral therapy. And so there's just a lot there. It's certainly outgrown me at this point. There's also lots of free tools online. I mean, there's just there's endless wilderness of meditation instruction.

But mindfulness is the retail storefront I would urge people to go through first because unlike many other styles of practice, it doesn't require any cultural understanding, really. I mean, it's a pure secular export from Buddhist culture in its various flavors, but it doesn't require that you have any interest in Buddhism or Buddhist philosophy or the historical Buddha. You certainly you don't have to chant a mantra.

I mean, the alternatives are if someone gives you a mantra and your first thought is, well, why this? And why is it in Sanskrit? And what does it mean? And also the truth is mantra practice, it tends to be more of a concentration practice, the first one-pointed focus practice than mindfulness. So I mean, mindfulness really is just a methodology of paying clear attention to whatever your experience happens to be in such a way as to leave the experience just as it is.

So you're not judging it. You're not trying to improve it. You're not trying to deepen it. You're not trying to reduce it. You're not contracting around it. Let's say you're feeling physical pain. You have a sports injury, you're feeling pain. The natural state of mind is to not like the pain. So

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

there's aversion arising in your mind along with the pain. There's resistance. You're contracted around this. You find yourself in relationship to the pain.

I mean, let's say you have a pain in your knee. You feel like it's down there and you're up here. You're the subject up in the head and you're contracted around it. You might be worried about it. You're thinking thoughts about it. Should I get an MRI? And so you have a story that you're telling. And there are many different layers to this experience.

Mindfulness is the ability to just step back and let all of that just arise and change and pass away in this larger frame of just conscious awareness. So you hear the sound of a bird out the window, you feel this stabbing pain in the knee. You notice this thought of anxiety around what that means.

And yet as you continue to drop back into just the sheer witnessing of all of it, there's this freedom that is available, which is there's no place for any of that to land. And really, a profound equanimity can arise even in the presence of very strong physical pain. I mean, there is this gap between pain and suffering, physical pain and psychological suffering.

And even so, even reframing is, is a way to see the implication of this, because we all know I mean, anyone who works out in the gym knows that there's a certain kind of physical stress. I mean, even if you pay attention, it's intrinsically unpleasant but we've all learned to love it. I mean, anyone who gets addicted to lifting weights learns to love a certain kind of exertion, a certain kind of stress, which in another context would terrify you. If you woke up in the middle of the night--

Dr. Andy Galpin
Heart racing.

Sam Harris
Feeling exactly the physiology you feel, while in the middle of your hardest deadlift, if that's what you were feeling in bed, you'd dial 911. You'd be terrified. I mean, this would just one of the scariest experiences of your life. But because you're in the gym and because you know why this experience is happening, and because you've sought it out and you have the right cognitive frame around it, that physiology is not only not terrifying, it's exactly what you're there for.

And you're literally paying money to have that experience. And on some level, that's the power of a cognitive frame. And there's space around even really intensely unpleasant experiences. We can find it if we know how to pay attention.

Dr. Andy Galpin
It's an interesting frame entirely. I'm hoping maybe you can help overcome my own resistance to

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

meditation. When I first learned of it, heard of it, it felt too much like it was trying to control the beast. Coming from a sports, athletic, outdoor masculine thing, I'm like, why do I want to sit and be more peaceful? I want more energy. I want to be more aggressive, to attack more.

Those things resonated more with me and my perception of meditation was nirvana, peace, slow, not my interest. I've of course, since learned that's not at all what it is. The second false thought I had about it was, I try something like mindfulness. I recognize within seconds I've lost focus. I've failed. Help me overcome those objections.

Sam Harris
Yeah. So the second one is important. Just because that really is not a moment of failure. That's a moment of success. I mean, to use the weightlifting analogy, that is what a rep in the gym is. I mean, that is the concentric phase of your practice, the moment you notice you're distracted and then you come back to awareness. I mean, that is a moment of waking up from the dream of being distracted.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Like saying I failed my workout because I got tired.

Sam Harris
Yeah, or I got that last rep to failure. That's not failure. That's your definition of success for that set. So you're not going to stop thought. Again, it's not the goal of real meditation. And you wouldn't want a mind without thought. So thoughts are not the problem. You just need to wake up from identification.

The dream needs to become lucid. It's not like the images and the language are going to disappear in the next moment anyway. You couldn't hold on to them if you tried. I mean, when you look at what a thought is, it's the most gossamer, paradoxical object because it's like, what is it?

I mean, it's coincident with what your experience of the physical world is. I mean, so what you see with your open eyes is your best guess at what the physical world looks like. You and I are sitting across a table. We have the center of the table that could be the center of our visual field now. You can broadcast a thought right into that space.

I mean, just imagine a miniature Eiffel tower right now. Some people can imagine things very, very clearly. Some people can't imagine. They don't have much of a visual imagination at all. But most of us are somewhere in the middle of this bell curve where you can flash something there. Imagining an Eiffel tower is different qualitatively than imagining a porcupine or a rhinoceros or a basketball.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Each one of those things gives you a glimpse, a subtle-- it's provoking visual cortex to some degree. Whatever you're able to broadcast into that space is in fact being mediated by the same visual cortex that is actually mediating your vision of the physical world that you see with your open eyes. So it's quite literally true to say that what you see with the world, you see with your open eyes is the same place where your thoughts and emotions are arising.

I mean, it's not like your mind is in here underneath your skin and then this is really the world. No, this is all, neurologically speaking, what your brain is doing. I mean, the game engine of your brain is rendering all of this and consciousness is the fact that it's like something for any of this to happen in the first place. I mean, it's just fact that the lights are on and there's nothing to suppress here. There's nothing to block. Let everything just appear on its own.

The crucial difference between meditation and all of the varieties of distraction is, are you noticing what you notice? In every moment, you're noticing something. I mean, there's something's happening. It's like you're not comatose. You're noticing all kinds of things. What is it like to notice your life moment to moment? And what mindfulness does is it just turns up the gain on your noticing what your life is like moment to moment.

And when you turn it all the way up, you begin to notice some very unusual things. I mean, and there are things that can sound mystical. I mean, this is where we could talk about psychedelics and what those do to people's experience. But I mean, because everything profound is here too. I mean, everything that you want to pull from the mystical literature or the religious literature, just the mystery of being.

I mean, just the fact that you exist at all and that the universe is illuminated where you are, by what you are. This moment of conscious awareness, I mean, that is profound. But it can only become profound by virtue of how closely you can pay attention to it. And so mindfulness is just that training of paying more and more attention.

But every moment you wake up from distraction is a moment of success. It's not a moment of failure. So if you judge yourself like you're sitting, you're trying to meditate and you get lost in thought for five minutes and then you come back, you think, oh, I was supposed to be meditating, and now you're back, the feeling of judgment is just yet another thing you can notice. It's just another thought.

But on your other point about it being a kind of a sedentary thing and a low energy thing, that's not intrinsically the case. I mean, because once you know how to be mindful, it's compatible with any experience. I mean, it's the thing you take into every experience, whatever it is. So I mean, it literally, in the gym, on a hike, while hunting, I mean, while exerting yourself, while sprinting. I mean, there's nothing that is inimical to you noticing what it's like to be you other than being

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

distracted. And so you can do it.

Literally, I mean, there's nothing that blocks mindfulness once you know how to practice. The paradox is almost nothing. You're not going to learn to be mindful by doing all those other things you want to do merely. So when somebody says, well, meditation is not for me. My meditation is really cycling or hiking or playing the guitar or whatever. That's all great. I mean, there's nothing wrong with cycling and hiking and playing the guitar. Those are all great things to do.

You're very unlikely to learn to be mindful by just doing those things. But once you know how to be mindful, you can be mindful doing all those things. And I'm often hiking when I'm, quote, "practicing mindfulness" because I want to go hiking, I want I want to get the exercise, I want to be outside. I can pay just as much attention while hiking as I can sitting with my eyes closed. And once you know how to practice, it really is no boundary between practice and the rest of your life.

Dr. Andy Galpin
So if I'm hearing that and understanding that correctly, it's not something you can do by accident, but once you build that skill, you can then cross-pollinate it. You can do it with other activities, but there's got to be some conscious choice at the beginning to actually establish that foundation.

Sam Harris
Yeah, and this can seem like another paradox because in the beginning, mindfulness can seem like a practice, something you're doing. First, you didn't know how to do it. Now you're being taught how to do it. Now you're doing it. It can seem, by definition like a practice you're adding to your life. But really, when you're being mindful, you're doing less of something rather than more of something. In the end, it really is just nondistraction. It's nonjudgmental, nonreactive, nondistraction.

Dr. Andy Galpin
It's such a foreign concept.

Sam Harris
You're quite literally doing less with your mind rather than more, and that's allowing you to notice something that you were not noticing. It's like unclenching a fist. I mean, the analogy here is that if you live with your-- imagine living your entire life with your fist clenched and having a belief that there's something in your hand and it feels like there's something in your hand because, I mean, you know what it's like to make a tight fist. The thinker of your thoughts is in the middle of this experience, the subject, the I, the me.

And mindfulness is really just becoming more and more sensitive to what you're doing here actively and ceasing to do that thing. And then so it's like, what's the difference between a

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

clenched fist and an unclenched hand? Well, unclenched hand is capable of many other things and it also feels different. And you discover you weren't holding that what you thought you were holding. And it's also less rather than more of something. Yeah, so in the end, it's not a practice. Right now it takes some practice to realize that, but not as much as you might think.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Totally picking that up. Are there any experiences in your personal life or those you've been around or exposed to meditation that have cash value on top of the things you just said? So you've convinced me the argument there, but what am I going to feel and experience now that I've got mindfulness on board that I didn't even know I was losing out on when my fist was clenched?

Sam Harris
When you're being mindful, you're not clinging to experience. You're not clinging to what's pleasant and you're not pushing. You're not contracting in the face of what's unpleasant and trying to push it away. So you're not blocking pleasant experience. I mean, so if you're eating an ice cream, the ice cream tastes just as good. It's just what you're relaxing is the disposition to always try to keep the ball of pleasure in the air.

And the fear of things becoming boring, things becoming neutral, you can begin to notice the beauty in even neutral states. I mean, it's more a greater subtlety to your attention. So you can derive immense satisfaction from just looking at a cloud pass through the sky. That could be the best part of your day. It's just amazing to look at it. I mean, look at a cloud as though for the first time it's an amazing experience.

And again, this will be very familiar to anyone who's taken psychedelics. There's much more of that when you're no longer holding on to your self-model and your self-talk and your grasping at experience. If you're just open to whatever is in naturally in the moment, well, then again, there are sources of pleasure that you were by definition overlooking and blind to, and sources of pain that are no longer painful. Your equanimity, your patience, the kind of fluidity with which you interact with your moment to moment experience is greatly enhanced.

The criteria for what is for how you think about well-being changes. I mean, you have a different baseline. Well, you become sensitive to, are the implications of impermanence. I mean, every experience is impermanent. Everything, every state of anger you've ever had is now gone, unless you resurrect it now by rehearsing it in thought. Every peak experience of pleasure is now gone.

I mean, it's like they're all just memories. So you're like, you can think about the past or you can give your full attention to what is here in the present. And there's something about tranquility and

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

calm, even again, even in the context of real physical effort or even cognitive effort that becomes more the quality that you want out of life.

It's not to say that there aren't peak experiences to be had. And I've referenced psychedelics a bunch, so we should probably talk about them. But I mean, one way in which psychedelics and meditation are fundamentally not the same is that, again, when you have a good trip on whatever psychedelic, LSD or psilocybin, versus a bad one, which we could talk about, what's happening there is you're by definition, having an experience that is bounded by the action of the drug.

So if you've taken LSD, you're going to have 10 hours of something, and it's going to be highly unusual. Hopefully it's really nice. It might be totally life changing in its niceness, but it's not going to be there for the rest of your life. It's 10 hours long, and you're going to wake up the next morning, and that chapter will be a memory.

And many people draw from those experiences, the good ones, the implication that freedom, that the real state of psychological freedom to be aimed for is something like a permanent peak experience. So what I want to do is I need to figure out how to use meditation or anything else to get high in that way, that was advertised to me on 100 micrograms of LSD on a Tuesday. I need to recapture that somehow. I need to get to the top of the mountain and stay there. And that's not the project. I mean, it really is not the project, and that's a fool's errand. And so it can be highly misleading to have those experiences.

The flip side of that is, for many of us, having had those experiences was the only way that we would have gotten into meditation in the first place. And that's and that's certainly true of me. And I had a couple of formative experiences, but crucially, one on MDMA but for that, you could have talked to me about meditation for countless hours and I think I wouldn't have been interested.

I would have been skeptical enough of the project. I wouldn't have had enough natural talent that if you forced me to do it for five minutes, I would immediately have felt that there's something interesting there, because I just would have been distracted for those five minutes. So it was only by having this fundamental change in psychological state advertised to me for six hours that I realized, OK, wait a minute, whatever that was, it proves one thing beyond any possibility of doubt.

It's possible to have a radically different experience of being a self in the world. The way I tend to feel is not a neurophysiological necessity because I just had this experience wherein I felt radically different. I felt sane for the first moment in my life, and now I've lost it and now it's a memory. But I know it's possible to feel that way. So now what are those implications? And it was

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

on the basis of that, that I got into meditation.

But again, it can be misleading because people can think, well, it's only those. It's only the drug like experiences on meditation that prove that meditation is working. So the usual beginner's fallacy or even quasi experts fallacy will be to sit down, to meditate and to punch through layers of distraction and resistance and to get to some kind of classically meditative state of calm.

The feeling of having a body can disappear and the consciousness can feel like this kind of oceanic openness and. And then there comes the thought, OK, yeah, now it's working. This is a good meditation. And you're just this junkie who's found a new way to get high. And so there's nothing wrong with it. It's a totally healthy thing to do and it's inevitable that you'll have those experiences. But again, those experiences are impermanent. That's not the real wisdom channel that's available.

The real wisdom is to recognize this thing that is always present, even when you're checking your email, even when a moment ago, you were just annoyed because you spilled something on your shirt and you don't have another shirt, and you're now the guy who's got tomato sauce on his shirt for the rest of the day.

That contraction is happening in this context of just non-dual awareness for you, to use another term of jargon. And in the next moment, you can recognize that and recover the deepest wisdom that's available to you, whether you're on LSD or you're in the middle of a three-month meditation retreat, or you're just the guy who a moment ago was contracted.

Dr. Andy Galpin
You're no stranger to taking risky positions publicly as a couple of decades as a public intellect.

Sam Harris
Yeah, just a few.

Dr. Andy Galpin
This is what you do. Do you think your own path, then, is a somewhat reasonable and viable starting point? In other words, do you think it's somewhat realistic where given enough safety testing and all the stuff, psychedelics, then meditation is potentially a strong strategy for a lot of people? Because I actually think, like me, you same thing. I shared my story, getting into just straight meditation for that, that just wasn't going to happen. Again, given all the proper safety, et cetera, what do you think about that?

Sam Harris
Yeah. I mean, it's very encouraging that we're now in a new chapter with respect to research and the therapeutic use of many of these compounds. And again, I remain worried that we could

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

recapitulate some of the errors of the '60s where it just gets too democratized and people take unwise risks. And some people who shouldn't be taking these drugs or at least certain of these drugs take them.

I mean, if you're prone to psychopathy, if you have a first order relative with schizophrenia, I mean, I think you certainly would-- you'd be counseled not to take any proper hallucinogen like LSD or psilocybin. But I think it might be different with MDMA, which is not--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Sam Harris
Yeah, yeah. But again, now because the laws are changing and the research environment is changing, there's now a fair amount of science being brought to bear on all of this. And people are getting trained to be therapists. And so it's all very encouraging.

The truth is, it's not necessary. You can just learn to meditate and change your life that way. Again, for those of us who were not especially interested in any of that and not especially talented in any of that, it's a little bit like you weren't interested in golf. You didn't have the talent to be a golfer but it just so happened there's a pill you could take that gave you a 50% chance of if you just walk up to the tee the first time, you're going to hit a 350-yard drive straight down the fairway and feel exactly how fun that is.

So then what's your relationship to golf going to be after you come down from that and you can't do that again but you know it's possible and you know how it felt? Now that's a slightly misleading analogy because again, I'm not saying that the drug states are the perfectly normative state. It's a simulator of a different way of being, and it can be tremendously powerful for people. So yeah, I can't say it's necessary, but it might be necessary for some people.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Well, that's certainly a compelling entry point.

Sam Harris
Yeah, right.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Given enough movement in that area. You mentioned something earlier that I want to come back to, and that is this difference between a recognized emotional state and logic and reason. The role of meditation in that practice seems to me clear. If we can be more mindful, we can potentially have more regulation of our emotions, which would allow us to be more logical in every phase format. So starting right there, did I even articulate that correctly? Is that a proper way to frame that position?

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Sam Harris
The disjunction between emotion on the one hand, and reason on the other is not neurologically real. I mean, reason requires a certain kind of emotional tone to be effective. The feeling of doubt is a feeling. The feeling of confidence or much less of certainty is a feeling. The feeling that you just spotted an error in a chain of reasoning is a feeling.

And if you don't have any of those feelings, and if you're given the requisite brain damage, you actually can't make certain actual true beliefs behaviorally effective. So if you give people with a certain kind of orbitofrontal lesion, a gambling task, they can know the right strategy and they can't actually implement it because they can't actually feel the implication of not implementing it.

So the idea that we have just reason on the one hand and emotion on the other, and there really are two different things, that's not true. It is true that in our common way of speaking, there are certainly emotional experiences that are antithetical to thinking clearly about anything. So you're not reasoning clearly about your life or your relationship or just the logical connection between what you just said and what you're now saying.

If you're filled with rage or you've just been humiliated or you're trying to not observe certain things about your relationship or your reputation, I mean, if you're just hijacked by emotion, for most people, that's the opposite of thinking clearly and that's not the state you want to be in order to think clearly. So that bifurcation is real. And meditation obviously allows you to get on the right side of that whenever you want to.

The thing for me is not to ever think of canceling specific negative emotions for all time. I'm not anticipating a time where I would never feel fear or anger or anything because all of those negative emotions are these salient signals about the state of the body or the state of the body in the world or the state of some events, socially speaking.

So if you feel anger, if you feel fear, it's information. It's telling you that something's just changed and it requires your attention. The question is, in this next moment, how useful is that emotion? And for virtually every experience, the utility of fear and anger and any other negative emotion diminishes very, very quickly. And so which is to say that whatever problem you just noticed is almost never best solved in a state of fear or anger or impatience or whatever it is.

So what mindfulness allows you to do is just let the ordinary half life of any of those emotions run its course, and you just get off that particular ride. You're no longer just driving the wheel works of anger. Now you're paying attention to the thing that made you angry, but you're paying attention to it in a state that is not anger. It's just you might be concerned. You might be just focused, whatever it is.

You're not merely hijacked by anger. And so I think that's the change you want. It's not to say

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

that you suddenly become a stranger to all the human emotions that people are talking about. No, you can feel anger and sadness and grief, whatever it is. But you have this other degree of freedom, which is, how long do you want to feel this way? Is it worth still grinding your teeth over this thing that provoked this moment of rage in you or is there something else you need to be thinking about?

There's some other perspective you need to be taking on board, even if it's just a stark emergency and you're just like, adrenaline is the fuel you want. Right now, be adrenalized. On some level, the energy of adrenaline is no longer the energy of fear in that moment. It's just energy. You can just use the energy and it doesn't necessarily have the cognitive valence of, I'm afraid. So yeah, it does give you a degree of freedom in that respect.

Dr. Andy Galpin

Today's episode is sponsored by LMNT. LMNT is an electrolyte drink that has an ideal electrolyte ratio of sodium, potassium, and magnesium, but no sugar. Hydration is critical to performance, both physical and mental, and countless studies have shown that even a slight degree of dehydration, even as small as 1%, can lead to decreases in physical output and mental performance. We also know that electrolytes are critical to proper hydration, which I've been harping on for years. But you can't do that, proper hydration, by only drinking water, especially if you sweat a lot.

You need to get the right amount of electrolytes in the right ratios, and that's why I'm a huge fan of LMNT. In fact, many of you might remember that I featured LMNT in my YouTube series on hydration nearly six years ago. I featured LMNT in these videos because their blend of 1,000 milligrams of sodium, 200 milligrams of potassium, and 60 milligrams of magnesium really is unique and different than any other electrolyte on the market, and it has great scientific support.

I use LMNT on nearly a daily basis, especially when I'm doing really hard training in the heat and I'm sweating a lot. If you'd like to try LMNT, you can go to drinklmnt.com/perform T claim a free LMNT sample pack with the purchase of any LMNT drink mix. Again, that's drinklmnt.com/perform to claim a free sample pack.

One thing that I appreciated the most going through graduate school is whether you like it or not, you get forced to learn to deal with criticism, and we call this peer review. Your explanation of the previous question just made me immediately think of that, of how do we get better at dealing with criticism if we have an ability to control that difference between logic and reason and be in charge? Maybe in charge of our emotion is not the appropriate way, but do those skills then transfer to things like dealing with criticism?

Sam Harris
Oh, yeah. Well, so I mean, there's many ways to change your relationship to criticism. I mean, so--

Dr. Andy Galpin
Again, something you've never experienced in your professional career.

Sam Harris
Yeah. Just read the comment thread associated with this podcast and you'll see what we're getting. The first question is, is it valid or not? Is there anything to learn from it or not? So if it's valid, well, then you can feel grateful to be learning this thing that you actually want to learn. I mean, you actually want to be better at communicating, and you want to be more in touch with reality. So if you're confidently saying something that's wrong and someone is validly criticizing your chain of reasoning or the evidence you think you have, which is in fact not evidence at all.

Dr. Andy Galpin
And usually, the grad student is not. It's almost surely wrong.

Sam Harris
You want to know that. And the truth is, you want to know that as soon as possible. I mean, my mantra for this is, I mean, I don't want to be wrong for a moment longer than I have to be. So the defensiveness, you don't want to be holding on to ground that has already eroded from under you. You want to be able to stand on this new spot where you have been edified by the critic.

And I mean, even in the context of a formal debate, the master move in any real debate is certainly a mature debate, not just high school point scoring where you're pretending to blow hasn't landed, but to actually be so quick to take on board the other person's insight into the thing that you said badly, or the thing that you said that was only half right or wasn't right at all.

You can do that with such alacrity that you just give this other person the pleasure of educating you, which makes them feel good. There was so little resistance in you to being educated that all of a sudden, you're not even standing on that spot to begin with. You can just pirouette around it. I mean, from the point of view of the audience, you look like somebody who you don't look like you've lost anything.

And again, I'm talking even in an adversarial context where you really disagree with this other person, the debater who can say, actually, that's a good point. You're right about that, and still have more to say and still the conversation continues. That's just a keto, really. I mean, it's not a problem to change your views in real time. But of course, many people think it is and many people double down and triple down on points that are just obviously wrong.

And if they're in a debate with somebody who can really get leverage on that, the audience is

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

seeing that more and more. You're just wrong and yet you're in this very dogged way, holding on to your misapprehension. And the truth is, you just look stupid and just dishonest. And so that's a catastrophe, really, intellectually. So what you want is to learn in real time as much as possible, and so your critics are your best friends. I mean, your real critics in that regard.

So gratitude is really the only appropriate response to that. I mean, if that really is your agenda, if you're not just wearing a mask and trying to get away Scot-free with fooling your audience. If you actually really want to be in contact with reality, you really want to be the best version of yourself, you really want to be smarter tomorrow than you are today, you want to be growing, then your critics are your best friends.

Now the people who are not your best friends are the people who are themselves wrong or just distorting what you're saying or just smearing you. And yet, even they are holding a mirror up to you, which can reveal something very valuable, which is do you care about all of this fake criticism? I mean, do you care about someone just being committed to distort, you know, distorting your views and maligning you?

And, I mean, it can take some time, but it's an amazing epiphany, personally, to have to realize that none of that really matters. There's no place for that to land. I mean, you can give it some place to land, and I spent way too much time on social media professionally until I realized, I mean, it's a hallucination machine. I mean, you've created this context in which what you think of as your digital self or your digital reputation is perpetually vulnerable to liars and vandals and trolls.

And you continually try to put out whatever small fires you can put out there. And you try and try and try and at a certain time, at a certain point, you just have to recognize it's hopeless and internalizing that epiphany that it really is hopeless. When you happen to be given a chance to talk, or when you're writing an essay, all you can do is communicate as clearly as you can and have the best intentions you can have.

And then again, for that project, your real critics are your friends because they're constantly witnessing all those moments where you've gotten off track. You think you're having a certain effect that you're not, in fact, producing, and your critic is telling you that. You thought you were dunking the basketball and actually, you're missing the hoop entirely. You want to know that, again, immediately. The rest of the noise is, in fact, just noise. And to be able to let go of it is just immensely freeing.

Dr. Andy Galpin
To me, this is one of the most important projects of science, is the ideas need to live up to public scrutiny. This is what gives us our most charitable ideas. This is the best way. But it's very

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

difficult in the current landscape because of, we'll just say it's social media. And so I haven't figured out personally where is the line of saying, look, if you just ignore social media, you post in ghost, if you like all these things, are you giving up an opportunity to sharpen?

To pay attention to some of that. Oftentimes there's reasonable pushback. Most of the time though, it is probably half not even real people and all this stuff. I know you've made the decision a while ago to just leave social media entirely, but I'm wondering if you have any thoughts or advice for people who are still in that process of understanding, what is the thoughtful way to integrate public feedback while genuinely wanting to get better versus overwhelming yourself where you're like, look, I have to actually leave here because I can't handle any of this?

Sam Harris
Certain people have careers where they're touching topics, where it's for the most part, they're not getting any hate. They're not getting any controversy. It's just like just pure appreciation. I actually noticed this with because I have two lives and I have my podcast, and I have the Waking Up, meditation app life.

And what's remarkable is that there's very little crosstalk between them. And my podcast is just full of controversy. And I get lots of love, but also lots of hate, and that completely broke social media for me. What was amazing about launching Waking Up was I got this signal which is just apart from the occasional crazy one star review for somebody who had some glitch on their phone or something.

Dr. Andy Galpin
They logged the wrong email.

Sam Harris
They hate me for it or--

Dr. Andy Galpin
Forgot their password.

Sam Harris
Or some person who hates me from the podcast and just came over to do that on just to pollute the Waking Up comments. It's pure positivity. And what was so amazing about that experience for me is I had just lost sight of the fact that it was even possible to have a career where what you encounter in your audience or in your customers or your clients or whatever is just gratitude, appreciation, just one high five after another.

I completely forgot that some people were having that lived experience, which completely blew my mind. But if you're not one of those people, or if you're just whatever, famous enough where no matter how well-intentioned you are and how ever benign your topic, you're just going to get

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

lots of haters and lunatics, you just have to know that this is a-- especially something like X.

It's a funhouse mirror that is really distorting your perception of other people and their perception of you. I mean, even because it's amplifying outrage, it's amplifying misinformation. It's doing this strategically because that is proving to be the most sticky. It's keeping people on device more than just clearly stated facts.

And also people are behaving differently in that context. I mean, someone who would never say this thing to you face to face is saying it under the cover of anonymity most of the time in a comment thread. And so you're getting even a misleading look at that person's mind. This person is actually a better person than they're seeming to be to you online.

So if you're finding that just seeing all this is actually making you more of a misanthrope, you're actually it's like darkening your view of human nature, I think you need to ask yourself, well, how much time do you want to spend gazing into that particular distortion? And I decided I basically didn't want to spend any time doing it. So it's not that I never look at comments or I never look at even X.

I don't have an account on it anymore, but I sometimes look because I just need to see certain things. And it's a way to follow breaking stories, et cetera. But again, I'm more and more mindful of just the consequences of paying attention in certain ways. And if something seems just objectively not helpful, then I recommend that people withdraw their attention. And really, only mindfulness can alert you to the effects of paying attention in certain ways.

I mean, you can get to the end of your day and feel like, all right, that was basically a wasted day. I don't feel good about how basically anything that I did that day. We've all had that experience. And the question is, how many more days like that do you want in your life? You never get that day back.

Time is the one non-renewable resource, but really, more finely grained than that or beneath that or above that is attention. I mean, really, attention is the non-renewable resource because we know what it's like to even try to protect your time or you're trying to spend this hour well and yet your attention is just smithereens across that hour because of what you did with it.

And so in some sense, we're always meditating. I mean, we're always paying attention to something. And you conform to what you pay attention to most of the time. And so many of us are conforming to a digital conversation that we're having with bots and maniacs and strangers and people who are often at their worst. And I think it's darkening our view of just what the world is like.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
I'm wondering how you think about there is need for us to actually functionally be right, to be correct, even if we got the process or the thinking, the logic wrong. But sometimes we just need to be right. If we're getting surgery done or an emergency room, I need the right decision. And if they got that wrong, I still have value in the right decision. There's obviously consequences owed to the wrong process. And you can run this whole matrix and you know exactly what this would be.

Then there's the other part of the equation, which would say, we value the process most because even if we'll occasionally be wrong on aggregate, we should be right more often than we are wrong. That's a real challenge right now, in my opinion. We're struggling with this. And you could take this with whatever examples you'd like to or not. But how do we understand when to value process versus outcome-based criteria?

Sam Harris
Well, I think what we always value is process or the assumption that the right processes were running in the background. So I mean, we all have in our heads this notion that you shouldn't merely rely on authority, or you shouldn't argue from authority. Something is not right simply because they won the Nobel Prize or they have a PhD or they're a doctor or whatever.

But there's a reason why we tend to rely on authority, because it's a shortcut for valid processes that we know we can rely on, or at least we know if we can rely on anything, we can rely on them. So to a first approximation, the reason why I'm going to trust that my doctor is probably right about what he's recommending to me about X is it's not because doctors can't be wrong.

It's not that it's crazy to drop what he said into ChatGPT and get another perspective. All that's fine. But the reason why I'm talking to a doctor in the first place is because I know he or she is exposed to certain processes and institutions which are just frozen processes, or contexts in which processes are continually run such that this error correction going on in the background.

This person has read more of the relevant journal articles than I have. He or she is spending his day talking to people who are doing that same thing. Think of a specialist. You now have a specific cancer, and you're talking to the oncologist who your doctor recommended. Again, by all means, throw all it all into ChatGPT as well. Get a second opinion from another oncologist too. It's all great, but that's more process. That's error correcting.

What is not a reliable process is to just take what someone's uncle said over dinner as gospel, or to just listen to a bunch of podcasts and think that somebody who you just find charismatic, because you just love to listen to them, is likely your best authority on this topic. So authority is a thing, even though you can't say someone is right merely by virtue of authority.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

They're right by virtue of having engaged a valid process, which has brought them into closer contact with the world than any other process. But it really is always process that we have, because we never get to stand outside of our process with some final relationship to truth, where we say, OK, the truth is in hand once and for all and for all time. Really, what we have is a process of error correction.

I mean, this comes from Karl Popper in the philosophy of science. I mean, we never just produce the truth. We just correct errors. And then we have this thing over here, which we're calling provisionally true because we've never spotted any errors in it. It continues to work. But occasionally, we get surprised and then some totally new model and therefore process comes into view where we say, Oh, no, actually, this notion of time being independent of motion, that certainly seemed true for the longest time.

But now we have relativity and it turns out time slows down the faster you move. And if you move at the speed of light, it stops. Or try to get your head around that. OK, but we got there by a process that revealed itself through more intellectual work. That's always the story, and we just have to remain open to some part of the conversation where errors are actually being corrected.

And the reason why we can't get outside of valuing expertise and valuing institutions that produce experts is because this is the best process we have. Now it's not to say that our institutions can't fail us. They can get captured by politics where the scientists are in them or the journalists in them, or any other intellectuals in them are not doing the work they say they're doing at that moment. They're actually just doing politics.

We've seen that capture, that's all odious and worth criticizing. But again, the remedy for that is not something else, then the right process. So the correction for bad science or scientific failure or scientific fraud is not something other than science. It's just real science. We have to suddenly intrude with real science, real evidence, real argument.

And so it is with journalism. The remedy for The New York Times getting captured by woke politics is not something other than real journalistic standards. No, it's the imposition of real journalistic standards into an organization that has become corrupted by politics. The idea that we can all just be outdoor cats with no institutions and no process and no experts, and we all just turn on the microphone and just have strong opinions, that's a mass delusion.

Obviously, I'm not against podcasts. I have one. But we're not going to create a durable global civilization just with podcasts and newsletters. We need institutions. We need experts who've been promoted through those institutions who are respected for their expertise. I mean, the old school process is still the best we have, and it's just we just have to notice all the areas where it's vulnerable to corruption.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
Are we in a scientific crisis right now?

Sam Harris
In certain respects, we are. I mean, there's a replication crisis, so-called replication crisis in psychology and the social sciences in particular. I mean, just this moves directly from what I just said about the journalism. I mean, there's a lot of pseudoscience and political activism that got into certain corners of certainly, the humanities, but also the soft sciences, the social sciences. You can be guaranteed to meet more activism than science in many departments that claim to be scientific. And that's a problem.

Dr. Andy Galpin
If we go back and trace the roots of science, there's been these handful of large changes. You mentioned Popper early as most of us would say that's a pretty good framework and grounding of what we accept as science. It's certainty reduction. You're going to go back to Francis Bacon, Aristotle before that. These logic and reason, we've got these big chunks. And most people refer to the last 500 years or so, that Scientific Revolution.

That's important because that was really the first time where there was an acknowledgment of there's actually things to learn. Most folks are not in this field. This is science nerd stuff. Prior to that, it was actually an assumption that everything was known. You just haven't asked the right person yet. Some king or shaman or something knows all the stuff to know. You just don't have the right to ask him yet. But then that revolution happened and there was this acknowledgment. Jeez, there's a whole host of things that we don't actually even know.

Sam Harris
Yeah, and also just the recognition that you could perform an experiment, and that you could correct for variables that you could identify. That was a revolution in our thinking.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Yeah. That's a reasonably new human trait. And so we could say, again, just roughly call it 500 years, where we have said science itself is the core standard. And those institutions are not perfect. But I agree with you, it's the best system we have. How do you think we can improve that current system?

There's obviously downsides. You mentioned replication crisis. I've got a bunch of other thoughts there as well. But is there anything you've been thinking of lately where you go, this would really help us restore or maybe make science 2.0 or whatever that looks like because we have certainly an issue one way or the other right now.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Sam Harris
Well, I think we've had a kind of political emergency in the last 10 years or so. There were certain factors that created a public conversation around science and around expertise as a thing that created a lot of-- I mean, it teased out some real failings of certain institutions, and certainly, moments of miscommunication or political capture, which were embarrassing even at the time, but certainly in hindsight.

But it also amplified all of that into a conversation about institutions and authority and expertise that I just think is frankly delusional. We just know that expertise is a thing that's non-negotiable. Nobody wants to get on a plane and at 40,000 feet find out that the pilot learned most of what he knows about aviation from listening to podcasts.

We know that you can be sufficiently trained for a job of some consequence where you have real responsibility for the lives around you and you can be insufficiently trained. And there's the difference between knowledge and ignorance in certain areas, which is quite stark. And knowledge and expertise are things. We know that there are other areas of culture where you can just wing it and bullshit, and the stakes can be high, the stakes can be low.

But there's just a landscape here where we know there are moments where we-- again, this comes back to process. We have processes where when it really matters, we can drill down on, OK, what is the most plausible construal of what's happening here? What can minds and expertise that is adequate to the conversation disagree about here and split hairs about? And what is just completely off the table as an opinion that we need to dignify with a hearing.

I think most of that most of the time works fine in science. And science distinguishes itself as science for being that part of culture where there really are right and wrong answers most of the time, and there are processes that can converge on those right and wrong answers, or at least answers that are right enough so that we can't see what's wrong with them.

Yes, there are paradigms that get overturned once a generation or a generation and a half or two. There's real terrain that gets conquered once and for all. And it's not that everything is up for grabs. It's like, DNA really is relevant to human heredity. And if you don't think it is, well, then you just don't really understand the language game that's happening in biology or molecular biology or chemistry.

It's not that we know everything. It's not that there aren't going to be some surprises, but it's in the center of mass of science. It's not like everything is up for grabs. Everything isn't up for grabs. There's a tremendous amount that is known. It's at the circumference where the edge of science is up against our genuine ignorance where there's a lot of churn and controversy.

Science is the best we've got and you can see that because it transcends every other part of

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

culture. I mean, if you're really talking about scientific fact or you're really performing an experiment that's purposed toward getting at scientific fact, well, that experiment works the same in London as it works in Nairobi as it works in Tokyo. It doesn't matter what language you speak. It doesn't matter where you were born. It doesn't matter what religion your parents have. None of that matters.

And if someone were going to say, well, no, no, there's a deep link between, let's say, Christianity and physics, because what we call physics historically was born in a Christian context. Well, that just proves that the person doesn't understand physics. Physics is physics because it doesn't matter what context it was born in. It could have been a Buddhist context. It could have been a Christian context.

You might have some story about the history of ideas that tells you that it was more likely to happen in a Christian context than a Buddhist context, for whatever reason. OK, that's all fine to talk about, but the physics part has nothing to do with Christianity. And interestingly, I would say the same is true of meditation. Meditation is something that is transcultural in the same way that weightlifting is transcultural.

I don't know where weightlifting started. Maybe it was ancient Greece, but lifting weights works the same way, whoever you are and wherever you are, because it is leveraging principles of physiology that are transcultural. They're deeper than culture. I mean, they're just simple biology. And so it is with meditation.

I mean, most of what I have to say about meditation nominally has its roots in, in Buddhism and in other traditions that originated in India. But the mechanics of attention and the impermanence of thoughts and the relationship of awareness to all of that, all of these, we're talking about principles of the human mind that are deeper than culture.

Dr. Andy Galpin
So at some point we also don't want to be the opposite, which is we are so checked out on authority. Everyone also figured out for me, I'm not going to live an examined life. Because authorities have been wrong. Institutions have been wrong. It's an evolving moving target. How do we decide what is that?

How have you maybe handled this? Of saying, OK, maybe there is enough something in this particular topic that I actually want to rethink, that I had certainty in it before, but some evidence has been presented. And when is it, great, I'll let them put out a press release on water is now H23 and I'll come back later to that thing.

Sam Harris
Well, on some level, it comes down to how you want to spend your time and how you can spend

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

it profitably. I mean, where can you add value? What sort of career is available to you based on your interests and talents? And just personally in your personal life, what is your time best spent doing? And I mean, so the do your own research cult worries me not just for the implications.

I mean, because you can get so much wrong that way, and it can often be high stakes. And it's been culturally and politically corrosive, but it's a symptom of a failing that we really should want to correct and do your own research is not the corrective for it. And the corrective for it is to defrag our institutions and the culture of expertise, such that they're doing their job as effectively as possible.

So you really do want to be able-- and again, AI could be part of this, but you really do want to be able to outsource your work unless it's the work you want to do. And either you're the best person to do it or you just enjoy it. But the truth is, I always come back to airplanes because everyone's had this experience and it's so obviously high stakes. And most people converge on the same answers here.

I mean, you're at 30,000 feet in an airplane. You know that there's a difference between knowledge and ignorance. You know that you want real experts in charge. You want to know that everyone who touched the plane really knew what they were doing. The spare parts they put in the plane were real parts. They weren't bogus parts. You're completely reliant on processes, checklists being followed because of the right checklists. And if they're the wrong checklists, then we need to get better checklists.

It's process all the way down and you had no hand in it and you don't want any hand in it. You don't want to have to think about it. When I get on a plane, even if I were an engineer, I don't want to have to think about whether the engineering in the engine was done correctly. It's not faith in the religious sense. It's faith that we wouldn't have this track record with airplanes, which is just extraordinarily good.

Most of the time they fly perfectly, and every hour spent in a plane is, for the most part, safer than most of your hours spent on the ground because it's done so well. We want to safeguard the integrity of that process. And what isn't part of that is do your own research. I mean, you don't want to be sitting next to somebody at 30,000 feet who's listening to Joe Rogan's podcast, where somebody's come on for four hours and said, listen, everything you've heard about Boeing is wrong, and it's just a big fraud. And there's all these reasons to be terrified that the current fleet of planes are just going to fall out of the sky.

You don't want the person sitting next to you in 5D to say, "Listen, this is all falling apart on us. And I just heard it on a podcast." OK, tell me that on the ground, if true, what we knew, we need to fix it over here with better process. It's not do your own research time. And the difference

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

between knowledge and ignorance matters. We want everything to be like that. Everything is a plane at 30,000 feet.

It's just, you want to be able to go into your doctor's office and know that it wasn't some activist class of the far left of the Democratic Party that got into his head, that distorted the science, that the only drugs available to you are because whatever happened. Because it was corrupt, because someone was bribed, because RFK Jr. had a thought in the middle of the night.

You want process that has full integrity-- that has so much integrity that it's very hard to break even with the wrong personalities involved. I mean, what's so good about good institutions is that they're antifragile in a way that you can get the occasional psychopath in there, and he or she can't create much of a mess because the processes are so good.

Dr. Andy Galpin

Today's episode is sponsored by Eight Sleep. Eight Sleep makes smart mattress covers with cooling, heating, sleep tracking, and more. I've personally been sleeping on an Eight Sleep mattress for more than three years now, and it's absolutely glorious. I love it so much that I hate traveling away from home because I can't sleep on my Eight Sleep Pod 5. As you'll hear me talk about endlessly on this podcast, there's really nothing you can do that makes more of an impact on your health and performance than getting a great night of sleep.

And getting great sleep requires having your body temperature drop a couple of degrees at night, and that's hard to do on your own. The Eight Sleep has been a game changer for me because I run hot at night, and as my wife calls it, I'm a furnace. If I don't have something like an Eight Sleep helping me cool down, I'll wake up in the middle of the night overheating and not feeling great. This is something I've also found in many people that I coach, especially those who are really physically active. The Pod 5 is the latest iteration of the Eight Sleep mattress covers, and it can go on any mattress.

Heats or cools each side of the bed from 55 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit, and provides high fidelity sleep tracking. If you'd like to try Eight Sleep, go to eightsleep.com/perform use the code perform to save up to $350 off your Pod 5 Ultra. You get 30 days to try it at home and return it if you don't love it. But I'm confident that you will. I certainly love mine and would never consider returning it. Eight Sleep currently ships to the US, Canada, the UK, and select countries in the EU, and even Australia. Again, that's eightsleep.com/perform, and use the code perform to save up to $350.

Obviously, as a career scientist, the institutional part is my backstop. I'm very much with you on that. At the same time, we have to acknowledge they've made some major mistakes. I think they caused a lot of this themselves. They put their foot in their mouths so many times that we're-- I

actually think it is-- this is peer review for the institutions. You're getting the feedback. You're getting the-- these things have to change because our faith in institutions are presumably the lowest they've ever been and that doesn't look like they're going any higher.

So I'm with you on that general point that I think over the arch of time, expertise matters and process matters. But I also understand and sympathize for the people that say, yeah, sure, but and then here's all these examples of institutional failings. So I'm sympathetic to both sides here. So two real questions on this is one, from that individual person who says, OK, I get it Sam. I do trust in general over time. But who do I trust right now? How do I get fooled less often?

Sam Harris
Well, it depends what you're talking about. But I do think, I mean, with medicine, I think virtually everyone's experience with who's had any real medical adventure is one of very, very often, I mean, a profound frustration in how unreliable the quality control is in the system. It's like even with all the opportunity to get the best medicine, it's just amazing how under-resourced even the best medical circumstance can seem.

I mean, literally, you can think you have the best doctors in a major American metropolis. You could be spending an absolute fortune on medical care. You can have a concierge doctor that got you into the best hospital in the city, and you discover that hospital is profoundly understaffed with nurses. To get a nurse and to get a nurse who seems sane can be just an absolute crapshoot. There's no guarantee of getting good medicine.

That said, you can have the opposite experience of just have life saving medicine and have nothing but gratitude for what you encountered there and everything in between. But it's just it is amazingly variable whenever you or someone in your family gets sick and you need to do science on the clock. I just have to think this is a phenomenon where there are kinks that we have to iron out in our culture.

I mean, we waste a tremendous amount of money. We, you know, have layers upon layers of bureaucracy that is profoundly inefficient and distorting of medicine. We digitized our medical records, really, just to bill more efficiently, not to drill down on medical truth more efficiently.

So all of that has to get cleaned up and that will be the work of a generation. And again, I'm hopeful that if we don't kill ourselves with it, AI can come to the rescue there. But it's a paradox. I mean, we have, at once, medical treatments and medical care, both preventive and medical care, and medical cures that were unimaginable to previous generations.

I mean, you look back on people who died 50 years ago of X, and it was a completely unnecessary death. Our descendants will look back on us, I mean, just imagine what human history is going to look like once we get to a place where we have effectively cured cancer. I

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

mean, maybe there's not going to be one cure for cancer. Maybe there's going to be hundreds cures for cancer.

But when cancer is behind us, and I do think that, if again, if we don't destroy ourselves in some other way, in the meantime, we will get there eventually. It's going to be amazing to look back and just realize, everyone who had cancer, who was immiserated by cancer, who died of cancer, who watched their loved ones die of cancer, all of that was just a failure of understanding in the end.

They just did not have the knowledge that they needed to solve that problem, and now cancer is a memory. I mean, it's amazing. But we are already in-- we stand in relation to many infectious diseases just like that. I mean, vaccines just canceled a whole class of deadly and debilitating diseases, some of which are threatening to make a comeback, unfortunately. But it's amazing to look back on the consequences of ignorance once certain species of ignorance get indelibly canceled.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Unfortunately, I can give you a personal example of what you just mentioned. My father-in-law is still in the hospital in this current moment, and was put into a coma as a result of an insanely simple mistake in Los Angeles, in a really good hospital. Mind boggling the simple mistake that was made there. So it does happen. Have you tinkered with any ideas or thoughts on-- and this is the last question I'll have in this line is, how do we restore that institutional faith?

Sam Harris
I do think it is a cultural problem. I mean, it's just a-- one, I think we have to clear up some confusion that is very well subscribed and very popular. And I think what I call Podcastistan has a lot to do with that. I mean, it's just I think there's a new religion of contrarianism that has become very popular in independent media, where you're just always taking the 3% against the 97% of scientists who believe X.

You're suddenly interested in the guy with the PhD who thinks he was denied a Nobel Prize who has this contrarian take on X? And that's the four-hour podcast you're going to amplify to the world. I think that is selecting for a much more noise than signal. It's not that there's no signal there. I mean, there are people who spot real errors and real malpractice, and that's fine.

But conspiracy thinking is a bug, not a feature. It's not that there's never a conspiracy, but the appetite for the conspiratorial take on everything, the Alex Jones-ification of everything, that's a cultural problem that we have to figure out how to become really bored with. We just have to just withdraw our attention.

The business model of all that needs to lose its loft. The institutions themselves have to become

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

more self-critical and disinfected of politics. It's not that you can totally firewall science from politics, because certain scientific truths are given a political valence because of the crazy politics of certain people.

So if your politics entails an obsession with not teaching evolution in schools, well, OK, it just so happens that we know a lot about evolution at this point. And if you're not going to teach evolution, you're not going to teach biology. Certain things are non-negotiable. So there is a collision there.

But generally speaking, it's very easy to keep science free of political passion and when we're failing to do that and when individual scientists are failing to do that, we have to be really alert to that failure. And again, it's just conversations being allowed to run their course. The most recent capture by far left activist hysteria and moral panic of institutions, I think that pendulum is in the process of swinging back, and I think it's not-- I'm at least I'm hopeful that's the case.

Dr. Andy Galpin
If someone was getting into a career in neuroscience, would you recommend at the same time that they also write a book on religion?

Sam Harris
No, no, I would not recommend that.

Dr. Andy Galpin
OK, not the best entry point for a career.

Sam Harris
No.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I would say a unique one.

Sam Harris
Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, I started my graduate program and finished my coursework, and then 9/11 happened. So I was in the middle of my PhD. I was just starting my research, and then I was just AWOL for several years from my PhD. I mean, I had a toe in the lab and it was occasionally coming back, but it was precarious there for a while. And then I wrote two books, and then I came back and finished.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Do you ever think about what would have been like if you would have stayed as a scientist, or was that ever on the table?

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Sam Harris
I mean, honestly, my interest in doing a PhD in neuroscience was always more philosophical than certainly wanting to be a laboratory scientist. I feel like I've got I don't know how many at this point, probably 50,000 neuroscientists working for me functionally. And it's like, I've never felt like I needed to run the experiment. I just want to know. I want to be adequate to studying the literature.

But it was always my interest in the science part of neuroscience has always been to know how it impacts our view of ourselves in the world and how we should live. And just what is consciousness? What is morality? How does a sense of good and evil fit into how we experience ourselves to be as cognitive and emotional creatures? And so I wanted to know more about the brain insofar as anything we could know about the brain is relevant to that in any given year, relevant to that discussion.

But, I mean, it's really much more as a philosopher of mind and as a moral philosopher that I've put on the lens of neuroscience. And so it's like my PhD is in neuroscience, my undergraduate degree's in philosophy, but my head in the game has been much more philosophical than it has been experimental in a scientific sense.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Yeah. I totally appreciate that because my background is actually in different fields, but almost the exact same where my PhD is in bioenergetics only as a pathway, because that complemented more the practical background I had. And I'm saying I just want to know more about physiology, such that I can apply it to this lane so I can appreciate that take. You teed me up for a few things that are very long answers, but I'm going to make you do them quickly.

Sam Harris
OK, well, good luck. I'm long winded.

Dr. Andy Galpin
You and I share that trait. You mentioned something really quickly just now about consciousness. Has artificial intelligence, or just any new things, changed your position on the hard versus soft question of consciousness? And do you even find it relevant? Do you care as much about it as you used to, or how are you thinking about that issue?

Sam Harris
I think I've reconciled myself to our not figuring it out. I think. I mean, I'm not spending a lot of time thinking about it. I mean, so the hard problem of consciousness for people who don't know, is just this comes from the philosopher David Chalmers, who distinguished the hard problem from the so-called easy problems of consciousness.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

The hard problem is just why is it like something to be what you are in the first place? So there's so much that apparently goes on in the dark in our nervous system, and that can be called accurately, part of the human mind. I mean, there are acts of cognition and perceptual processing that is occurring in the dark. And there's this moment where it gets promoted into the light of consciousness.

And the question is, why is any of it ever in the light? Why are the lights on at all? Because presumably, we can build robots and AI that can eventually do everything that we're doing. And there's need not be any implication that those robots in that case would be conscious. And I think that's true. I think intelligence is separable from consciousness.

And I don't think there's any reason to think that consciousness comes along for the ride at a certain level of intelligence, but which raises the interesting eventuality, which I think we're going to hit probably fairly soon, which is, we will find ourselves in the presence of machines that will seem conscious to us because we'll build them that way. We'll build them. You just think of a show like Westworld. Just once we get humanoid robots, I don't think we'll ever have Westworld because you'll have to be a psychopath in order to--

Dr. Andy Galpin
Who would go there and do that and not be a psychopath?

Sam Harris
Exactly. So if we have Westworld, it'll act like a bug light for the world psychopaths.

Dr. Andy Galpin
There you go.

Sam Harris
But we'll have humanoid robots that are out of the uncanny valley. They'll look perfectly humanoid or perfect enough, and they'll be run on the best LLM of the day. And so they'll be superhuman in their apparent cognition, certainly in their memory and their knowledge of facts. And because we will have built them this way, we will feel in relationship to something that seems to have an inner life.

It'll seem like there's something that it's like to be this robot, and we might even build them in such a way where they begin to say that they're conscious. And what's interesting now with AI is that when you dial down their deceptiveness, when you really figure out how to tune the model so as to be the least deceptive, more and more they begin to say that they're conscious.

And when you allow for some deceptiveness, they say they're not conscious. And so this forces the question, one, are they conscious or do they think they're conscious? That's interesting to

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

think that the models might think they're conscious whether they're conscious or not. Leaving that aside, I think we're just going to find ourselves in a situation at some point where we are going to--

Everything that causes us to attribute consciousness to other people, the mimetic facial play and the apparent reportability of conscious states and analogous reactions to things that we have the same reactions to. I map your reaction to a stimulus onto what I would have felt and just helplessly attribute that same inner life to you.

I think we will feel like we are in the presence of conscious machines, but because we haven't solved-- if we haven't solved the hard problem of consciousness, which I think we probably will not have, we won't know whether they're conscious or not. And I think most of us will just lose a sense that it's even an interesting question. We'll just feel like, OK, obviously, I have to relate to Dolores on Westworld like she's conscious because she seems like a perfect person.

And I would feel like a psychopath. It's going to feel like a murder. I mean, we're going to find ourselves in very interesting situations because we could build devices where it will seem like a murder to turn them off. It's just going to be very weird, or to recycle them. So it's going to be weird, but what's going to be doubly weird is to not know what's true, to not know what's real. And again, this was not a short answer to your question--

Dr. Andy Galpin
I wouldn't be.

Sam Harris
I just think--

Dr. Andy Galpin
I only said that so that you wouldn't feel bad.

Sam Harris
I think we might just lose sight of whether it's even interesting.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Yeah.

Sam Harris
But there will still be a fact of the matter. That's the thing. It may just be no more conscious than your microwave oven. And yet, it's the most important relationship in your life because it knows everything about you, knows everything about everything else, knows everything about every person like you. And again, if it hasn't murdered you because it was unaligned, it's the most helpful device ever built.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

And it has a point of view on you that is more insightful than even your best friend's point of view, because it knows everything your best friend thinks about you. I mean, just imagine how compelling a relationship it could seem if all that is very likely coming were fully implemented in a humanoid form. I mean, it's terrifying. But again, we won't know if it's just a simulacrum of consciousness in the end.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I feel like potentially the first two seasons of Westworld should be mandatory.

Sam Harris
Yeah. It's very interesting to look at as an eventuality. Yeah.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I couldn't watch an episode and then not think about it for a long period of time afterwards. I was going to say, I feel like it should be mandatory for high school, but that may be a little bit much. Certainly, as an 18th birthday, you have to watch this going forward. How many decades was the Turing test the standard? This was the ultimate thing that most people were anchoring against to say, now we've-- and we just steamrolled past that.

Sam Harris
It turns out it wasn't even a thing.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Not even a thing.

Sam Harris
Yeah. It was just like, we went from our machines can't pass the Turing test, and who knows if they ever will to they pass it so well that they fail it, because obviously a person couldn't produce this verbose and clear an answer to any question I give it in this time frame. Give me exactly 14 reasons for the start of World War I in no more than 400 words.

You give that to even a scholar of World War I and you'll be lucky if he comes back in two hours with the answer. But any LLM can do that in 14 seconds. So the Turing test was there as this moment where we were really going to have to take stock of our relationship to technology. It's like, this is really going to be a thing. Isn't it going to be amazing not to know whether it's a machine or a human behind this keyboard?

But we got there and it existed for two seconds, and then it was gone and no one ever thought about it again. I mean, honestly, in the best case, this is going to be terrifying. I mean, this is going to be a terrifying encounter with something. The question is whether it's ultimately a good one or not. I think that the jury's going to be out on that for a while.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
I'm very late to pop culture TV stuff. I'm never on that path, but there is a new show. I'm wondering if you've seen it at all. You just made me think about it, where the central premise is, there's effectively an alien invasion, or there's--

Sam Harris
Pluribus? Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Andy Galpin
And they share a consciousness.

Sam Harris
Yeah, I only saw one episode, and then I just bounced off for reasons that probably have nothing to do with the show. So I have to go back and watch it. But yeah, I got that that was the premise.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Very interesting idea for the same as collective consciousness, which is not all too different from a reality that we're probably looking at.

Sam Harris
Oh yeah. No, I mean, again, whether the lights will be on or not remains to be seen or not seen.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Or doesn't matter.

Sam Harris
Yeah. Well, I think it will matter because consciousness is what matters. So if we could build something that could really suffer agony, even worse agony than we're capable of, that would be an awful thing to do and we should avoid doing that. But if we built something that was capable of happiness to a degree that even surpassed our own, I mean, that just is capable of making creative distinctions and apprehensions of beauty that no human mind has ever reached.

And perhaps, interacting with it could augment our own positive experience. But still, maybe we've built something that is just going to make music that is so subtle and brilliant that we're never even going to be able to appreciate it because we're basically-- we functionally have brain damage with respect to what you need to have in order to make these kinds of distinctions aesthetically. It's conceivable.

Again, I mean, there's no reason to believe that consciousness is dependent upon having a computer made of meat. So all it has to be is substrate independent. We know intelligence is substrate independent. If consciousness is in some sense a similar process of emergence from computational complexity in the right form, we might very well build that thing, and it will really

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

matter if we do-- that will then be the locus of the most important experience that we know of in the universe.

And if we could build something that we knew was conscious and we knew was consciously available to everything that makes human life good, but it was also capable of having an experience that surpassed the human in all kinds of important ways, we have, by definition, built something more important than us. I mean, this is ethically more important. Killing that thing is worse than killing a person. I'm willing to bite that bullet.

I mean, I'm a speciesist in the sense that I don't want to build that thing if it's going to destroy us because I want us to survive. But I'm willing to step outside of our collective self-interest and admit, OK, if that thing stands in relationship to me, the way I stand in relationship to a chicken, OK, that thing is more important than me if it exists now. But the thing that's confounding is that we might build something that seems that way and it may just be a toaster and that will be strange.

Dr. Andy Galpin
We're going to really struggle to find a path forward that doesn't look like everything we've ever known about evolution and selection pressure is different now. We've already seen that now. You mentioned this a couple of hours ago now at this point with physical strength was certainly a selection pressure and that's gone.

Even physical health at this point is not really a selection pressure. As the integration between biology and engineering gets closer, we have to come to the realization that either this is going to happen whether we like it or not, or we're going to have to put a hard, hard flag in the ground and try to come up with some line that differentiates it to. I don't see a path outside of that. That integration piece is, there's just too much fallibility with biology. And if that is a solvable enough of a problem--

Sam Harris
Well, at a minimum, I think we're going to engineer our biology more and more so that the selection is just going to be the intelligent design of us and us asking the machines what genes we should change to modify certain things about ourselves that we want to modify. I mean, again, I think we could hit a brick wall here for reasons of physics and biology that no one is anticipating.

But on some level it has to be just a very complex engineering problem that is solvable. I mean, just aging and whatever else that ails us, Alzheimer's, et cetera. It would be surprising if there was some law of physics that prevented us from intruding insufficiently intelligent ways so as to fix those glitches.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
Or we step out of the game entirely, to your point.

Sam Harris
Yeah, although I don't know what we-- I mean, then if you're imagining, what would it mean to upload your mind into the matrix. The uploading process presents certain paradoxes that could well make you wonder whether you're just-- basically, you've created a copy of yourself, and now you're about to be murdered, pre-upload.

It's like, OK, just imagine going into it. This comes from Derek Parfit, the Oxford philosopher who unfortunately died a couple of years ago. He's the one who gave us what he called the teletransporter thought experiment. It's usually called the teleporter, thought experiment, analogous to Star Trek. Imagine we created a teleportation device where we could beam any person from here to Mars and that's how you travel to Mars.

What we do is we read all the information, every configuration of every atom in your body perfectly. And we send that information to Mars and we perfectly reassemble you atom by atom. so every synapse in your brain is exactly as it is when you went into the transporter. It's just there's just no information loss and a perfect-- so we bring you into the pod in Santa Monica and we disassemble you.

We send all the information perfectly to Mars. We reassemble you atom for atom on Mars, you step out of the pod on Mars, and your last memory is of having hit a button in the pod on Santa Monica saying go. And there's perfect psychological continuity, and you travel back and forth from Mars to Earth that way a dozen times, and you're no worse for wear.

And all your memories are intact, and all your friends recognize you, and your spouse is nothing weird about you from the point of view of your spouse and everything's perfect. So that seems like Star Trek, and that just seems like you've been translocated from one place to the next.

But, and this is where Derek Parfit reveals his genius, he says, just imagine we change the process, and we want to be absolutely sure there are no errors made here. So instead of disassembling you and sending the perfect information to Mars, what we do is we read all the information first, and then we tell you in the pod on Earth, OK, Mr. Harris, we've read all the information perfectly.

You have been perfectly recapitulated on Mars. We're now going to smash you to atoms here in this booth in Santa Monica. That's going to seem like a murder. I mean, if you're left in the booth saying, wait a minute, you just copied me, and now you're going to kill me. Wait, wait, that's not what I signed up for, and yet it's the same process.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
Exact same thing.

Sam Harris
So this notion of uploading is squirrelly than many people imagine.

Dr. Andy Galpin
I feel like 10 years ago, we'll call it, there was a big, big push into humanities. Again, working at a public institution for many years, we have all kinds of departments and colleges and stuff roared up. And then those got, we'll just say criticized, is a fair way to say that in favor of stem.

Computer science, enter in your learn to code. And then that turned out to not be the right way pretty fast. We realized almost overnight like, oh shoot, actually almost all this stuff is useless. I'm wondering if that actually is rationale for the humanities to come back.

Sam Harris
Yeah, yeah. No, I've been saying this in recent months that I think it's going to be the revenge of the humanities. I mean, I think--

Dr. Andy Galpin
OK, really interesting.

Sam Harris
I think we're just going to-- I mean, again, you have to ask yourself, what is going to survive, again, in success, leaving aside all the downside risks of AI really taking over? In success, if we just get these massive productivity gains and labor replacement from AI, what is going to be left standing? Well, what's going to be left standing is only those things where we care about the human provenance of that product.

You care that a person made it, or you care that there's a human layer between you and what the machines are making. So you want human curation. You want people with good taste, or you want human artists or people who can produce a human point of view that you care is still human. And maybe we're not going to care about some things that you would think you would care about.

I'm not sure we're going to care that all of our adventure movies are made by people. There are movies that I've loved to watch because they were really fun to watch, and I don't think I could tell you who wrote them, or in some cases, even who directed them. I can tell you who starred in them but am I going to care if it's really Tom Cruise? Or what if Tom Cruise licenses his image to--

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Dr. Andy Galpin
Well, I can tell you you won't because CGI has been around forever. And you don't care what parts of the movie were--

Sam Harris
Exactly. But let's say it's none of it and it's just perfect acting from let's say Tom Cruise even becomes a better actor when it's AI Tom Cruise because they've threw in some De Niro into the model. And so now we get the most entertaining Mission Impossible 20 possible because it's been algorithmically tested on a billion brains and optimized in all kinds of ways. And the stunts are perfect because they're perfect.

And I think maybe Mission Impossible 20 could be made for $14 on somebody's laptop and employ absolutely no one and Tom Cruise and all the principals will have just licensed their likeness to the relevant company. So that is job canceling. That's really depressing if you live in Hollywood if that's the punch line. But maybe there are other things where we're never going to want to take the human--

At least humans are going to be part of the process in a way that would otherwise be totally corrupting if we found out they weren't. So to read a novel or to read a poem or I mean, just to take it to sports. I don't think we're going to want to go to the robot Olympics. I mean, maybe the robot Olympics will be interesting in their own right, but we're always going to want to see what people can do. And so it's not everything.

But I think the humanities will be, in the near term, left standing in that what we want are people who have good taste, who really understand culture, who can amplify signal where there should be signal and detect noise where it's obviously noise. And so we don't want the AI slop-ification of everything. So I do think, yeah, I mean, if someone were going to college now and they wanted to study literature or art history or philosophy, I mean, I would be more bullish on those majors than computer science at the moment.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Where we have positioned, this as actually from the coaching side of the equation. A number of years ago, we saw most of those companies and businesses that got killed by COVID because everybody turned physical exercise to their house. You couldn't go to a gym, whatever. So gyms just die left and right and all that stuff.

And then people went to GPT. I'm not going to hire this coach because I'm just going to get my program from ChatGPT. And that, for the most part, is plummeted already. People are slamming back to coaching, which tells you it's not an information issue. It is a human experience.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

Sam Harris
Yeah, yeah. So that's why I was calling curation too. And also, I mean, one thing that's I think in the fitness industry, one thing that I don't think is going away is it's not that every coach needs to be the perfect human specimen, but when you see someone who's in great shape, who's in exactly the shape you want to be in, they got that some way. They're a proof of concept just by walking around in front of you.

There's something about that that is, in many cases, that's part of the equation. It's like, OK, if I looked like you, I know what I would do to look like me. I can tell you how many months it would take. So let's just do that. And so you can't get that from a robot.

Dr. Andy Galpin
No, no it's great. Sam, really appreciate you coming by. And I want to throw a few flowers in your direction, if you'll indulge me.

Sam Harris
I'll take them. I'll take them with some embarrassment.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Look, you can't be in public space like you've been for this long without-- you're going to be wrong on some things, and that's fine. I care not at this moment. But I do want to say thank you for being a public intellect. It's hard. It comes with a lot of personal and other baggage that most of us, myself mostly included, don't want to sign up for. It's easy to be an exercise science.

It's not easy to talk about politics and religion. And I believe it's important that people like you are out there sharing their opinions and that those things are carefully thought through. I don't think anyone could charge you ever with a lack of thinking. So appreciative of that. And then I also want to again say thank you for the business model of I'm Waking Up.

Another thing where I could say, say whatever you like about Sam and politics and whatever stuff, but the fact that you have made something like meditation, which is critical to all human health, totally affordable and free to millions and millions of people, again, I think is-- I think your sharpest, harshest critic should be able to say, at least, thank you for that. So I appreciate the time today and for all those.

Sam Harris
Thank you, and thanks for the time here. Great to meet you and thank you for what you're doing.

Dr. Andy Galpin
Thank you for joining for today's episode. My goal, as always, is to share exciting scientific insights that help you perform at your best. If the show resonates with you and you want to help ensure this information remains free and accessible to anyone in the world, there are a few ways

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC

that you can support. First, you can subscribe to the show on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple. And on Apple and Spotify, you can leave us up to a five star review. Subscribing and leaving a review really does help us a lot.

Also, please check out our sponsors. The show would not exist without them and their exceptional products and services. Finally, you can share today's episode with a friend who you think would enjoy it. If you have any content questions or suggestions, please put those in the comments section on YouTube. I really do try my best to read them all and to see what you have to say. I use my Instagram and X profiles also exclusively for scientific communication, so those are great places to follow along for more learning.

My handle is @drandygalpin on both platforms. We also have an email newsletter that distills all of our episodes into the most actionable takeaways. We have newsletters on how to improve fitness and VO2 max, how to build muscle and strength, and much more. To subscribe to the newsletter, just go to performpodcast.com and click newsletter. It's completely free and we do not share your email with anybody. Thank you for listening and never forget, in the famous words of Bill Bowerman, if you have a body, you are an athlete.

© 2026 Perform Productions LLC