

## Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast

### Episode 34: Can Your Reality Turn on a Word?

Anthony Jacquin: Knowing you're in control, you can let go completely.

Tristan Harris: That's hypnotist, Anthony Jacquin. Anthony has been practicing hypnosis and hypnotherapy for more than 20 years. He had a television show in the UK and wrote the book, *Reality is Plastic*, and now runs the Jacquin Hypnosis Academy. He's also a former teacher of mine.

Anthony Jacquin: If you know you're safe, then it's fine to fall and move and swing and dance and whatever else it happens to be. Many of the best experiences we have in life are when we are right on that kind of edge

Tristan Harris: Surrendering and losing control in hypnosis in a therapeutic environment can feel good because the purpose is about healing, but there are other times when we surrender control, say inadvertently, like when we fall into a newsfeed or end up scrolling for much longer than we intended, or we're caught in a kind of trance and we didn't mean to lose control, but some of those same mechanisms are operating.

Anthony Jacquin: We can do so much good with this and of course, it can be exploited.

Tristan Harris: Here's why we're talking about hypnosis on a podcast that's traditionally about how technology and social media are influencing society. It's an episode about uncovering the underlying code, the underlying operating system of your own mind. And hypnosis is one of the access points into the code that's beneath the conscious mind into the subconscious mind. The philosophical crisis that we're in is that our democracy is put the authority of what is real in the thoughts and feelings of human beings, the individual feelings and representations that we have, our tastes and preferences.

Tristan Harris: But what happens when the underlying code of the human mind can get hacked? So when we think about hypnosis, we're just trying to investigate is how do our minds really work and what lessons can be gleaned for the ways that technology might operate with those subconscious parts of ourselves in a humane, caring, and fiduciary way, as opposed to one that is extractive and negligent?

Anthony Jacquin: Hypnotists, if you like, can show you how to change the way you think, feel and respond, accepting that your personal reality, as much as it feels solid and reliable and real is influx, it's just a point of view. It is a fiction.

Tristan Harris: If you're feeling doubtful right now, you're not alone, but that may be because you've never heard hypnosis explained accurately. Think of it like placebos. A placebo is anything that seems like a real medical treatment, but it isn't. Could be a pill, a shot or some other kind of fake treatment. But what hypnosis and placebos have in common is that they're just a psychological effect that the mind is so powerful that it can actually work anyway, even though you're just taking a sugar pill.

Tristan Harris: And science has proven time and time again, that the placebo effect exists even if the mechanisms are confounding to us and the people experiencing it don't know what's going on. Some people are more predisposed to the effects than others and that's also true of hypnosis.

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- Anthony Jacquin: We can't dish out placebos, it's deceptive, it's unethical, but we can dish out ideas and change beliefs that way and do that with good intentions.
- Tristan Harris: This is not actually an episode about convincing you that hypnosis exists or that you are vulnerable to manipulation. This is an episode that's just exposing yet one more dimension of how our minds work underneath the hood and how learning about it can help us build better, more humane and conscious technology.
- Tristan Harris: I'm Tristan Harris.
- Aza Raskin: And I'm Aza Raskin.
- Tristan Harris: And this is Your Undivided Attention.
- Tristan Harris: Anthony, welcome to Your Undivided Attention.
- Anthony Jacquin: Thank you, my pleasure to be here.
- Tristan Harris: So what would be a good way to warm our audience up to hypnosis? If you want to maybe explain a little bit about what hypnosis really is, and maybe untangle some of the mysteries of how our minds really work in ways that we don't think.
- Anthony Jacquin: Actually there is a lack of consensus amongst academics in the world of hypnosis and practitioners too. But I guess the popular view is that hypnosis is some kind of special state that you can put yourself into or be placed into. Some people call it a trance. And in that state that you become more responsive to suggestion and the ideas that are put your way. And for many years, that's what I believed. I don't believe that anymore. I actually don't think it's even that useful for us to describe it in terms of a special state.
- Anthony Jacquin: The hypnotic response has quite a unique signature that makes it different from just following instructions or commands. And the thing that all these different theories actually agree upon is that the subjective sense we have of volition, if you like on one end or non-volitional on the other, think of it as a doing on one end, a subjective sense of I did that, or a sense that something's happening on the other end.
- Anthony Jacquin: This is really what we play with. In fact, this is known as the classic suggestion effect. And despite appearances, actually hypnosis is always a collaborative act of the imagination. You collaborate so that you can have a non-volitional experience. It's kind of a bit of a paradox, but many of the best experiences in life are like that. We get involved, we go along with it, we run with the crowd, we cheer with the crowd, we dance for an hour and suddenly it's happening, we're dancing, we're having fun. So hypnosis is that, a collaboration, it's essentially a creative act of the imagination. But when you're experiencing a sense of non-volition with regard to your own actions, then some incredible things can happen and you can experience dramatic changes in your personal experience.

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Tristan Harris: One of my favorite examples when we first met several years ago, I was reading the book, *The Illusion of Conscious Will* by Daniel Wegner. One of the examples he gives in the book is this experience that maybe many of us have had. When you open a door, you put your hand on a door knob and you pull the door closer to you. You think you're the one opening the door, and as you're pulling it closer to you, you actually find out there is someone on the other side who is pushing it at the exact same time. And there's this notion, I think that that weird fuzzy line between am I authoring the choice of pulling that door closer to me, or was it being pushed towards me?

Tristan Harris: And I think whether it's losing ourselves in dance or losing ourselves in a newsfeed, where we're put into almost a kind of trance, are we choosing to have our finger continue to push the feed up and up and up or is there some kind of automatic process that's kicking in? And I think that gray zone of authorship I think is where hypnosis really plays. And in that, we can talk about things like Ouija boards, where is there a sense of volition really happening? Am I moving it? Are you moving it?

Anthony Jacquin: Absolutely. That is it. And that notion, you mentioned Ouija boards there as a perfect example of what is freaky is the experience of it happening. You're dancing along that line. And so many of the spiritualist kind of stunts from the 19th century were based on that ideomotor expression. In fact, that was an entire theory of hypnosis at one point, that you're imagining something and it's becoming your reality, the great social psychologists and hypnosis researcher, Ted Sobin, called hypnosis, believed in imaginings.

Anthony Jacquin: It's not that different when somebody has a problem. If you have a less common phobia, there's part of you that kind of knows balloons are not dangerous or cotton wool is not really dangerous, or these kinds of spiders aren't poisonous. There's part of you that knows that. But at some level, some part of you is imagining that's dangerous and there is a physical, visceral, emotional response. And that surge of emotion really defines your action. Even if it's crazy, even if it doesn't make sense, emotion seems to lead the way. And it's certainly one of the tools that I'm going to use to create leverage for my clients in a positive way.

Aza Raskin: One of the things that comes to mind as you describe, what is it like to feel hypnotized or what is it like to be hypnotized is, and this connects back to your habits point, is that it takes conscious effort, it takes energy, will to make decisions, it's like the end of a long day, you just want to come home and plop on the counter and be like, no, you just make decisions, "I'm just going to outsource". Who's going to outsource? It can feel really good. And I wonder if that's the feeling of being hypnotized. Is that giving up a volition? It feels good.

Anthony Jacquin: Yeah, that's the game I'm in. Is really ensuring people can feel comfortable to have a non-volitional experience. I can give you a couple of demonstrations, but even the things that you'll typically experience before a stage hypnosis show, or often early on in a therapy session, people will take you through physical exercises, the kind of things you may have done in a playground as a kid, you just call them body tricks and things like that. It defies your usual sense of control and involvement.

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Anthony Jacquin: So I want you to see the importance of that. Then coming back to our fingers on a screen scrolling or looking up and realizing you've been sucked into your feet again. You just meant to look at that, but 20 minutes passed or two minutes passed. Yeah. I don't really make any distinction between that and what I call hypnosis. It's an automatic act and yes, you're doing it, it's your muscles, it's your brain that's creating the action, but you lack the knowledge or the feeling of intention is gone and suddenly you have to try and claw it back.

Tristan Harris: I'm sure many people feel doubtful or skeptical of hypnosis. Oh, like I can't be hypnotized, this isn't going to work on me. And when we first met Anthony, something you said to me was around these sort of contradictions that we have in believing and not believing things at the same time. I think one of the examples you gave me is someone says, I don't believe in ghosts. And you say, well, that's fine, let's go walk through the haunted house then, let's go walk through that graveyard over there. And people say, oh no, I'd rather not. And so there's this, we say, we don't believe in something, but then we do. So I don't believe in hypnosis, but then part of us does and might be really interested and curious. And I think that one of the things about this conversation is it might feel creepy to people to start examining where our choices are not authored by ourselves and some of our reaction to hypnosis isn't going to work on me is actually a product of not wanting to feel out of control or like we're not the author of our choices.

Tristan Harris: The reason I was so excited to have you on is if we don't have an appraisal of how our minds can be and are constantly under the influence of an unconscious habits or unconscious patterns or beliefs that we don't know that we're running or identities that we're holding that we don't realize that we're holding onto. If we don't realize that there's a deeper code to the human experience that actually can be shaped and manipulated, both for good and for bad, both for therapeutic purposes and by Cambridge Analytica to steer elections, then we won't actually be able to have the conversation we need to have about what it's going to take to protect a kind of a new definition of a sovereignty of mind, or at least a more healing oriented version of being in relationship to things that can steer the lower level code of our nervous system.

Anthony Jacquin: Yeah. The, I don't believe in it. Generally when someone says that, I just say, it's not really a belief thing, it doesn't require you to believe in it. We're not going on faith. Let me show you something. And again, what happens like the ghost thing. If you say, let me show you something, often the non-believer will then back off and I think you've put your finger on it there. It's because they perceive it in terms of control or losing control. So there is this kind of deep fear.

Aza Raskin: I think it goes even a little deeper than that. It's beyond just losing control, it's the sense of who I am. It's the sense of identity that I know who I am and I'm offering my own decisions. And if you tell me that's under question, that you can manipulate the I, then who am I? That leads right to identity crisis.

Anthony Jacquin: Yeah. If you want to go there, we're going to ask those questions. If we're going to find ourselves at a point in life where we actually want to look at our sense of self, then that blade is a very unforgiving blade because nothing satisfactorily sticks to it, not your name, not your history, not your achievements. It doesn't quite add up,

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you are the sum of your parts or what you may come on to achieve. I think there is a great payoff for doing that introspection and going there and cutting away everything you're not, it's the oldest game in town. People have been doing it for thousands of years and it will have a profound effect upon you. And I think part of what drives our habitual need with social media and other things is an innate sense that something's missing or lacking and I need something to be complete, or I have an agitation and I need to quieten that, or distract myself or I feel distant, I feel disconnected and now I have a sense of connection.

Anthony Jacquin: For a moment social media is extremely good at delivering on those things. Just like objects can do that. And on a more refined search states can do that. For a moment whether it's Burningman, everything's perfect. This is how the world should run. It's good. But the mistake we tend to make, whether it's an object, a state or a like, is that caused my happiness and peace and connection, as opposed to called off the search momentarily. And you experience the relief of no longer striving out in that fashion. So there is something there, but hypnosis is not going to undermine your sense of self. It is going to show you that the vast majority of your behaviors are automatic.

Anthony Jacquin: Good habits, the ones that get in the way, the ones that destroy your health, they're just running. It's like there is a part of you that's responsible for that behavior just like there is a part of you that does walking and a part that does talking and a part that does clutch control and a part that can knot a tie. You don't need to know which hand moves first if you tie your shoe laces, there's a part of you that does that for you. You're happy to leave that particular employee doing its job. The part of you that's responsible for a panic attack or a phobia or an anxiety isn't that different. It's another loyal employee that turns up and does its job. It's not working independently, it's working for you. It just works autonomously. So if we're going to try and change our behavior, I think it is useful to talk about all of these things in terms of habits.

Anthony Jacquin: It may seem like we're splitting hairs, but the word addiction... Again, you might imagine there's a strong consensus around the word addiction or physical addiction, but there isn't really, there were lots of kind of social theories about when it's a problem for you. So I just prefer to look at all of these things as learned patterns of behavior. Obviously we weren't born with them and most of them are learned through repetition, often our value shifted along the way that helped embed the effect of that repetition. And whatever the behavior is, at some point in time, it served a purpose and that's most of our behaviors. Some fears of course can be born of a single event, a single trauma, a spike of emotion and an association is enough to give us a peculiar phobia or peculiar fetish. It can happen in an instant too. But in both cases, there is now a part of you that's responsible for your social media habit.

Anthony Jacquin: It's running. That's why it feels if you challenge it out of control, you're getting the reminders, not just from the device, but internally you're picking it up. You're patting for that phone when it's not in your pocket, you may even feel it buzz when it's not there. There is a part of you that's responsible for this behavior and we can talk to it. It sounds peculiar, but we can actually get into dialogue with these, and again, let me just say this, imagined parts. I can't say there's a neuro cluster that

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does this yet, but this language is something that resonates with all of my clients, whether they have physical addictions, whether they have social habits.

Anthony Jacquin: If I say to them, so you'd like more control or you'd like to be to travel freely or you'd like to be fit and well. It says, if there's a part of you that runs this behavior, every single one of them know, that's what it feels like. So my way of getting onto the bonnet is once we've ring-fenced the behavior as a part, I essentially negotiate with that part. It's a loyal employee that's happy to take another job. We just didn't speak to it in the past, ignoring it didn't work because it's that loyal, loyal bodyguard. He's not just going to stand down because someone else tells him to.

Tristan Harris: One of the important aspects of hypnosis, I think in its invention by set of different figures in Ericsson and others was figuring out this really peculiar use of language. That there were styles of language that aren't the way that we wake up and we talk to ourselves. I don't wake up in the morning, open my eyes and say, okay, Tristan, that part of you that wants to check your phone before you get out of bed and before you go to the bathroom or something, let's talk to him for a second. We don't wake up naturally learning that. And one of the beautiful things about hypnosis is this kind of unique language that was invented to be able to get in touch with these different parts of ourselves. So before we get too abstract and technical, and I love what you've shared, maybe it'd be good to give the audience a felt sense of some of these things.

Anthony Jacquin: Yeah. I'd love to do that. And if we do get back to talking about language patterns, I will really simplify it because the one language pattern that I think has the most utility and is actually the easiest to learn is pacing and leading, is essentially meeting someone at their model of the world, describing where they're at. And there's no real way to escape that. And then giving it one nudge in a certain direction. That really is the oil in the machine. And again, I think that social media does a very good job of exactly that. It meets us where we're at, it runs alongside us and then it nudges us slightly further left or right. Very difficult to escape, but it is possible. Let's give you a simple demonstration. So again, guys, this is a collaborative experience, It's not me making you do something, you're safe, well and protected. You're not going to go into some kind of deep trance and never wake up. It's not happened because hypnosis is not sleep. In fact, it has nothing to do with sleep. It's an active collaborative game.

Anthony Jacquin: You could think of this space between us like a live connecting space that's going to connect our realities. So for this to work, I'm going to give you some simple instructions. If I ask you to imagine something, I'd like you to do your best to imagine it, your job is to, if I say blue, think of the sky, think of the words, say it yourself, rather than sitting there and doing nothing, just let your imagination come up with blueness. If I asked you to find a feeling, I'd like you to do your best to find that feeling, it doesn't have to be overwhelming, perfectly real. But if I said, think of your favorite food, your favorite place to eat that food, you could engage in that, you could be absorbed in that idea.

Anthony Jacquin: So let's just start with the most basic technique that every single hypnotist does, every stage hypnotist does. And I'm going to add one piece and try and take it a little further. So even if you've done this before, just follow my instructions. So just

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sit comfortably in your chair, have both feet flat on the floor, just slightly out in front of you there, your hands in your lap. Can you put both hands out in front of you about shoulder height, clasp your hands together and bend your elbows, just like you're making a desperate prayer with your palms together and your thumbs crossed. Put your first fingers up about two centimeters apart, look at the gap between your fingers and they will touch. Look at the gap and they will touch, just like they're magnetized, they're going to move together and they will touch.

Anthony Jacquin: When they touch, close your eyes and squeeze those hands tight. Now with your eyes closed, as you squeeze, I want you to go out into a fantasy. Think of the person who is dearest to you now. If there's more than one, see more than one, but see their eyes again. See them smiling, hear their voice, feel what you feel for them. Notice where those feelings are. And as you feel that, and as you listen to me, your fingers are becoming stuck together, lock together, super glued and stuck. Even these fingers on the outside, completely stuck. When you realize they're feeling stuck, raise your hands a little higher so that I understand. I know it's a strange feeling, but imagine that one solid piece of material to the point that the harder you try and pull them apart, the tighter they stick.

Anthony Jacquin: You put some effort in, you're a strong lad. Pull as hard as you can. The harder you pull, that's why they stick. Now imagine that same stuck feeling that's righteous, then that same stuck feeling traveling down through your elbows, traveling all the way down to your backside, traveling to your feet. You are stuck there, completely stuck. I want you to try and stand up for me, try and stand up. Put some effort in, you've been able to do this for many, many years. The harder you try, the more difficult it seems to become. He's struggling there, he's an inch off the ground. Now hold onto those good feelings. I'm going to clap my hands, your hands will unstick and everything will be back to normal. You'll be full of those good feelings. There we go. Give them a little shake. Good.

Anthony Jacquin: So I feel like I could almost teach you everything I know about hypnosis via this technique, because the first piece here, when the fingers move is something of a body trick. It's likely that's going to happen even if I don't give any suggestions. But this starts with instructions. Can you put your feet on the floor? Can you do this? Can you do this? So I want to know that you're on board. It's not just blind compliance, it's engagement, you're with me on this. I mentioned pacing and leading as being the key linguistic skill that landing the machine, we can do so much good with this and of course it can be exploited.

Anthony Jacquin: So ultimately, I'm going to lead my clients to health and wellbeing and the outcomes they want. I want to lead them into hypnosis, into resourceful states. And the easiest way for me to do that is to begin by describing their ongoing experience. I make three kinds of statement. The first kind of statement is a statement that's so self-evidently true, it won't even demand your attention to move. You're sitting there. You're listening to me. So I can make statements where you don't even really need to check, you're just listening to a bunch of truths. We are describing what is.

Anthony Jacquin: The second level of pacing, sounds very similar, but it refers to things that are just slightly outside of your awareness right now. So your attention will need to reach toward them even for a fraction of a second to verify them. So you can feel the

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chair that you're sitting on or the bed that you're sitting on there. You can feel your feet on the floor. You can be aware of the temperature of the room. You can hear my voice. You may be aware of other sounds, each of these things, just for a moment, your attention goes there, but I'm also describing things which are true. Okay. So again, there's no way to resist.

Anthony Jacquin: And then the third level of pacing is where I begin to describe your inner experience. I don't know what that is. So here we become artfully vague, a phrase that the great hypnotist Milton Erickson used. So I'm not going to tell you, you are feeling relaxed or you are feeling angry, I'm going to point out the fact that you can notice certain feelings and sensations, your inner voice, thoughts, perceptions. So it's super, super vague. But again, it's impossible to bat away because it's vague enough that it's going to match up to your experience.

Anthony Jacquin: So, if we begin to dance back and forward for these statements, every now and again, I can just, it's like plus one. So your fingers are moving, they're going to touch. That arm is lifting, is becoming lighter. The higher it gets, the better you're going to feel. That's right, fingers twitching, arm lifting. So by describing someone's ongoing experience, a tear rolling down their face, how you are feeling right now, it becomes very easy to lead people.

Anthony Jacquin: So, if we look at the kind of information that we're seeing, even advertising is often doing this to us, it knows us extremely well. It can make a pretty good guess about our current state of affairs or situation or finances or pressures or thoughts or emotions. And then it can lead us. Charismatic speakers have been exploiting this one for a very long time. Watch any of the great speeches of dictators of old. You will see some pacing and leading going on and everyone cheering on that leading statement as if it's true. It's something to look out for. But I also think it's part of the answer. If our intention is to lead people toward resourceful states of mind and other useful things, then I think this should be in the toolkit.

Aza Raskin: It makes me wonder if we could decide what values we actually wanted our information ecology to have, what our social media could be leading us towards. Because the first question anyone's going to have is, who are you to decide which direction we should lead us? And of course the right answer is, it's already being decided. It's just hooked up to the very worst possible thing, which is the human amygdala and the attention grabbing. So if we can get past that and decide, we want to lead some direction, that could be a very powerful tool in this sort of reuniting of human spirit, ingenuity of coming together to tackle these incredible problems. It's going to take all of us working together like climate change to solve.

Tristan Harris: We were talking earlier about how technology is pacing and leading some of our worst selves right now. It's funny because the social media companies will say, we're just holding up a mirror to society. So if those are your conspiracy theories, if those are your racist, if those are your hate-oriented people, we're really sorry, we're just holding up a mirror to what's already there. But I think the point is that mirrors are selecting which parts of us they want to highlight because they could also say, "Hey, Anthony, you're creative." And you could find the parts of you that you resonate with that I am creative instead of you just hate the other side, or I could say, "Hey, you're really good at solving problems." And even if I don't fully identify with that, I

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can find the part of that that's true for me. And you could pace and lead that to the greater and greater sort of version.

Tristan Harris: And I think that's where we are not right now. Social media is not pacing and leading our best selves right now. It says the thing that works best are these hate clicks. So it's actually turning hate into an unconscious habit and then leading that to trigger everyone else into a hateful response so that they have an unconscious hate habit in response. But instead, how could it pace and lead compassion? How could it pace and lead collaboration? How could it pace and lead trust? The parts of us that want the same things as everybody else.

Tristan Harris: But to do that, it would have to take an active, conscious role of just like a habitus of, hey, when I start working with someone when they're in a trance, I'm not going to say, just like you said, Anthony, I'm not going to go to these negative memories and try to hang around there and keep your attention hovering over there. I'm going to hover over these areas of what does this client really want? What are they really longing for? And how do we pace and lead the parts of them that are already that way?

Anthony Jacquin: Of course, some percentage of the population and no one quite knows why are extremely responsive to any suggestions that are coming their way. We don't need hypnosis for this. Around one in five people are virtuosos. They can do incredible things. If they knew the techniques, they could reduce their suffering dramatically. They could go for dental work without an anesthetic, they could do incredible things. It is a bit of a spectrum and it's not a gullibility or weakness, hypnotic responding is a skill just like singing is. And some people can sing without training and some people need a bit of coaching. Some people are probably never going to sing in tune and it's the same with hypnosis. The moment you see it as the hypnotee's skill or ability or level of responsiveness, then they have the capacity to get better. It's really not about, too much about what I'm doing or my experience. It's very easy to learn how to hypnotize actually.

Tristan Harris: What I find fascinating is for those who did it and felt when you can see your fingers and you feel this intrinsic natural flow for them to pull closer together, which is actually as Anthony said, really due to the physiology of when you hold your hands tight, your fingers will automatically almost want to do that. But as the person in that experience, you don't have that explanation. So when he says your fingers are magnetized, you can feel them moving closer and closer together. My experience of it is that explanation briefly makes more sense than my own ability to make meaning of what's happening. And then the fact that your voice seems to be describing what's happening more accurately than my own internal narrative is what creates that pacing and leading. So now I'm starting to listen for, oh, he's saying the next thing, now they're moving closer together.

Tristan Harris: So now some part of me listening to that is going to say, okay, I'm going to, almost like I'm playing along, but there's a part of me that doesn't really feel that way. And that's where you start entering into that gray zone of anti-volition and there's this sort of pacing and leading. And then my impression of when you say, now think of, when your hands are close together, think of that person that you love, see them smiling, see them laughing. That's a good feeling in your nervous system. And once

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that feeling is there, you don't really want it to go away. So when you say, now pull your hands apart. I would lose that feeling that I love in my body right now so why would I let go of that? And so it's this kind of daisy-chaining of experience, compliance, choice, but then through the absence of understanding, what's really going on and being just one step ahead of the other person, because I think one of the interesting themes here that we're playing with is a hypnotist or a magician, we talk about in the film, The Social Dilemma or technology are seeing one step ahead in the chess board.

Tristan Harris: They've done that set of moves thousands of times before. And they know that the next move will have an effect before you know that it'll have an effect. And I think that in general, what we're dealing with here, both in the case of technology and the case of magic or a hypnotist, there's a playing a few steps ahead and knowing how to steer people's experience. Now in the hypnosis case, we're doing it for "positive therapeutic." Hypnotist is curious, and it's almost a fiduciary to what would be most in service of you. Are you working on a goal? Are you working on a pain in your body? Are you working on letting go of a belief or a bad habit like smoking? They're not saying, oh, you are susceptible in these seven ways. Let me just sell that to the highest bidder with my super supercomputer pointed at your brain to manipulate the most out of that next hypnotic step.

Anthony Jacquin: There is expectation, there is attribution, beliefs are getting formed along the way. There's all of that stuff. The other thing that I think is really important that's come out of the scientific study into the nature of hypnosis is the demolishing of this idea that you go into this special state and then you become hyper suggestible. The science has made clear that even if we do the induction, the score you would get on a test of suggestibility is pretty much the same before the induction and after the induction. On a 12 point scale, it actually moves by a point, if we just call it hypnosis.

Anthony Jacquin: If we do something that looks like an induction, then it nudges a little more. But ultimately it's not that significant. So for a while there was a kind of dip there of what am I actually doing? Is hypnosis a thing? But then it becomes clear that it's no, we are always on, this is the human condition. We are always responding with expectation. We are a pattern matching machine, we're an era detecting machine, might be more accurate. And the only stuff that's making it through is novel information and novel experiences. The rest of the time, our modeling processes are good enough, they just don't... There needs to be surprised if you like.

Anthony Jacquin: So, a lot of what we're doing with hypnosis is creating novel experiences. And as you said, we're one step ahead and I know your fingers are going to move, I know they're going to touch, I know if you squeeze, you're going to have certain physiological responses to that. So again, it isn't a trick, it's more than body mechanics, it's about your relationship to what happens. And of course you do retain the power to step out of that frame to say, hang on a minute, I'm going to relax or I'm going to do something else, I'll think something else. My job, if you like is to keep this plate spinning, to keep moving, to not really allow you in this demo at least, to get on any kind of firm ground, because the experience is just slightly edging away from you each time.

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Aza Raskin: There was another thing you did at the very end that I found fascinating. It was after the experience was over, you started talking about how being hypnotized or suggestible isn't a vulnerability, it's actually a superpower and you were redesigning my relationship to the experience that I just had to make it a positive as opposed to a, oh, I was so gullible. I'm reminded when I was reading a book on tarot card reading and the book opens up by giving a very similar kind of meta belief to the one that you just gave, which is says, hey, the images in your mind, the metaphors that you carry around are really powerful. Shouldn't you choose the images that you want to have in your mind? And so it gave this meta belief around why you should then use this particular tarot set. And I thought that was fascinating.

Tristan Harris: Really what we're getting at here is how much of our experience of reality is reality speaking for itself versus our beliefs or something about us that's shaping how we see it. And I think once you can change the code of how we see it, that's really what we're getting at. And that also relates to the whole topic of placebos, where how is it that the medicine, the actual chemicals of the thing we are ingesting might not actually be the thing that's driving all of the wellness or the well-being, but actually just the belief, how much lift can you get from the belief alone is a really interesting prompt when you have social media creating the daily beliefs about ourselves, about our social affirmation, about our validation, do other people like us or not. All of this is now coming through technology. So if we're designing technology, we ought to be really interested in the ways in which these beliefs form. And some of these tricks, they're not really all tricks of the mind, but just the mechanics of the mind, informing these beliefs about reality.

Aza Raskin: I really want to just drive this point home about the placebo, because it's not just take the sugar pill that you think is real and you start to get better. There are lots of other ways that the way that you believe or the mindset that you have about your body completely changes physiologically what's going on. So my favorite examples of this are from a 2020 paper published in Nature, and it was looking at diabetics. And they had diabetics come in and they measured the blood glucose and had them play video games for a couple of hours. But unbeknownst to the diabetics, their clocks are either going at half speed or twice speed. And for the diabetics, for the clocks are going twice as fast, the self-purported being much hungrier and even more surprising, their blood sugar level had dropped a lot further.

Aza Raskin: The perceived motion of time was the subjective motion of time was overpowering the objective motion of time at the biological level. And the same thing was true when they then, they give them a drink that had 15 grams of sugar, but they told one group that had zero grams and the other group that had 31 grams. And so you would imagine that there's just a physics to your body. You drink the sugar, insulin comes out, your blood glucose level goes up, but that's not what happened. They found that the perceived sugar level vastly outstripped the actual objective sugar level in terms of what happened for the blood glucose in their body.

Anthony Jacquin: Yeah, absolutely. They're incredible studies. There's also some brilliant work you may have seen Great Ted Talk on mindset by a Dr. Crum. Crum, C-R-U-M. She's done a lot of those kind of experiments with milkshakes, where they actually measure the levels of, I think it's ghrelin, it's like a digestive hormone or something that is labeled as fat and sugary and full of calories or it's labeled as no fat, no sugar,

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no fun kind of milkshake, same milkshake, then your body will digest that differently, it will behave differently.

Anthony Jacquin: She's done other stuff on perceptions of stress and perceptions of age. If you think stress is bad, it is, if you think stress is good, plays a part in life, then it's okay. The same with your perception of aging. Beliefs are kind of slippery. But the fact is our personal reality is the same, it's influx. It does have the readiness potential to begin changing because you've seen signs on the label of a milkshake. They're real physical and psychological and emotional effects just based on one piece of information coming past our senses. Professor Irving Kirsch, one of my real heroes did a lot of work comparing all of the market-leading antidepressants to placebo for many years. Found the difference in effect was not clinically significant, led to a change in the prescription practices in the UK. He ended up calling hypnosis a non-deceptive mega placebo because we can't dish out placebos. It's deceptive, it's unethical, but we can dish out ideas and change beliefs that way and do that with the good intentions.

Tristan Harris: One quote, I have Anthony, from one of our earlier sessions was often all we need is a reason to believe. And of course there's an upper limit. So just having sugar pills will not take away being paralyzed from the legs down or something like that or heal a tumor. But I think the question we're really playing with here is what is the upper limit? So what can be shaped with beliefs? Because we essentially now have a world where technology is a false belief factory. And increasingly the technology is shaping the menus from which our minds are even aware that we could be picking from. But of course you could get out of your seat, you could do a cartwheel and some jumping jacks, there's always more choices on life's menu. And it just so happens that technology is steering us in very particular directions.

Tristan Harris: And so, if we really care about a kind of deeper notion of free will or sovereignty or thinking sovereignty, we should care about being aware of the false ways that technology can really drive other kinds of beliefs. And I think about how confused our whole society is right now because of the mind warp of social media. And we feel incredibly certain that we know who the other side is or why they're so bad or something like that. And really we're just repeating over and over again these stories that have come to us from social media that are not all wrong, they bear partial truth. And that's what's true as you said, Anthony, and all of your work is, whatever that identity got formed, the shy one got formed for a reason or that pain you're holding onto, there's a part of you that's holding onto that pain or experiencing that because maybe it's doing something for you, reminds you to be careful about something. But I think when we loosen the grip on some of these things, it starts to unravel the sense of self uncertainty that we previously held.

Anthony Jacquin: It does. And it takes some courage to continue to stand in the unraveling, really, depending on how heavily you've invested in any of those particular, I say identities, let's just say your identity. We spend a lot of time investing in our identity and doing our best to show it off and get it validated. I think one of the healthiest things we can do in life should we feel the call to go and do it, is to do some of the deep work and ask those kinds of questions. What can I say with certainty is true about me? What is good, true and real about me? And much of what we've invested in is actually transient, it will change. What is unchanging? But it's deep work, man, it's

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not for everybody. Talking about language as well and the shifts with a word. One of my favorite things that again, has just made a massive difference to me, especially as a parent, it's an old thing. I think it's from Albert Ellis. Maybe he borrowed it from somewhere.

**Anthony Jacquin:** I first heard it from Jorgen Rasmussen, who suggested that most of the suffering in the world is caused by the tyranny of the musts. I think Albert Ellis called it the tyranny of the shoulds. I must give a good interview, I must achieve my target. The big one, of course, you must see it, you must understand this or the world must. The switch to the word prefer has a profound impact on relieving suffering. For me, when I first came across that I was getting incredibly frustrated with my son in the morning before school. You must wear your shoes, you must pack your bag, you've had two weeks to do this, you must do this to. I prefer it if you wore your school shoes. I'd probably prefer it if you took a pen to school. I could still express my point of view. But as soon as we stop insisting and we give people the opportunity for autonomy, then there's often a shift in their behavior and there's certainly a shift. The conflict is highly likely to disappear.

**Tristan Harris:** I'm just incredibly grateful to you, Anthony, for sharing some of these wise methods for interrogating and investigating who we really are and how we can shift how we see reality, that it's more plastic than we think that.

**Anthony Jacquin:** That was my pleasure. It's a reminder that you are your own best hypnotist. You may be your own worst hypnotist as well, but you can step up and you can recognize that again, your personal reality is a fiction. Therefore you have the licenses, as you've just said there, Tristan, to look at what's triggering it. Look at what's triggering these click or responses and change them, insist upon it because we can make positive change, we can assert some personal responsibility. It is worth stepping back, giving yourself that space and figuring out what do you want? What do you actually want to do with your time? What do you want to add to this world? How do you want to leave it? I really enjoyed the conversation. I appreciate it guys.

**Aza Raskin:** Yeah. Thank you so much, Anthony. If I take away one thing from this conversation, it's just how much perception or belief has the power to change reality and not in this sort of crystals and woo sense, but in the demonstrable actionable sense, the power that social media and these information intermediation technologies have is to become the way that we see the world. It warps the way we see the world that we can make.

**Anthony Jacquin:** I think the important thing is to turn your personal lens first. You've got to make these changes at a personal level. I admire the efforts to get these things changed at the macro level. And I hope that happens. But the thing you can do today is stop. Just simply stop, figure out what's important to you and give yourself some positive suggestions, create some new automatic behaviors that serve you well.

**Tristan Harris:** Totally agree. It's going to take a while before we fix social media. So we need people to think about, or we don't need, we prefer that people start to think about how we can start to question the fictions and the suggestions that we are giving ourselves on a daily basis and ask which mirror inside of our own mind do we want to shine back at our own psyche? The one that reinforces the old fictions or one

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that reinforces some new suggestions or opportunities and things that can be different.

Tristan Harris: Thank you, Anthony so much for doing this, we really appreciate it.

Aza Raskin: Yeah. Thank you so much.

Anthony Jacquin: Anytime, man. I love what you're doing.

Tristan Harris: If you're a fan of this podcast, we're trying something special. We'll be hosting conversations with podcast guests or their close allies after most episodes. There'll be a chance to connect directly with the people you've heard here, The Center for Humane Technology Team and others around the world, working to advance more humane technology. We'll be having a conversation with today's guest Anthony Jacquin on Friday, May 14th at 1:00 PM Eastern, 10:00 AM Pacific. You can find out more at [humanetech.com](http://humanetech.com).

Aza Raskin: Your Undivided Attention is produced by The Center for Humane Technology. Our executive producer is Dan Kedmey and our associate producer is, Natalie Jones. Noor Al-Samarrai helped with the fact-checking. Original music and sound designed by Ryan and Hayes Holladay and a special thanks to the whole Center for Humane Technology Team for making this podcast possible.

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