

Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast

Episode 41: Making Meaning in Challenging Times

- Tristan Harris: Real quick before we dive in. The Center for Humane Technology is hiring for a senior producer for this show, Your Undivided Attention. To learn more, please visit humanetech.com/careers. And with that, here we go.
- Tristan Harris: What if people subscribe to intense ideologies or conspiracy theories, whether pro-vaccine, anti-vaccine, Antifa, or QAnon, not only, or even necessarily, because they think those theories are true, but because those theories give their lives meaning. What if we approach the problems of misinformation or polarization by accommodating people's need for meaning? I'm Tristan Harris.
- Aza Raskin: And I'm Aza Raskin.
- Tristan Harris: And this is Your Undivided Attention, the podcast from the Center for Humane Technology. On the show in the past, we've talked about the meta-crisis, the interconnected challenges we face, which we talked about with Daniel Schmachtenberger. Part of the reason we have a meta-crisis is because we have a meaning crisis, or a collapse in our ability to make meaning in these increasingly challenging times. Our traditional ways of making meaning are breaking down. And in the vacuum people are increasingly turning to rapture ideologies of fundamentalism, or nihilism.
- Tristan Harris: Today on the show, we're joined by Jamie Wheal, Jamie is the author of Recapture the Rapture: Rethinking God, Sex, and Death in a World That's Lost Its Mind. In the book, he makes the case that in order to address the meta-crisis, we actually need to address the meaning crisis. We need more ways to stay inspired, mended and bonded in challenging times. And he argues that it doesn't matter whether we're making meaning through institutionalized religion or in other ways, as long as the meaning making is inclusive.
- Tristan Harris: And what we hope you walk away with is perhaps a new and more humane way to think about how to design technology that helps us navigate the challenges we face, from COVID to climate, by considering what helps us make meaning in challenging times. So Jamie, what is the meaning of crisis?
- Jamie Wheal: Sure, and great to be with you guys. I've looking forward to having this jam for a while. I think for me, I mean, at the highest, most structural levels, we used to turn to organized religion, and that you could call that meaning 1.0 for what does it mean to be human, to be alive, to be an individual, to be a member of a community, to be on this earth, to be of a tribe or an elect? And where do we go when we die? And that held up and oriented humanity in both indigenous and tribal, and then increasingly organized and complex forms for pretty much 99% of human existence.
- Jamie Wheal: And then 400 years ago, you get the European enlightenment, you get the American experiment, you get this emergence of modern liberalism, where it's suddenly not based on salvation of the elect, it's based on inclusion of the masses. Regardless of race, color, or creed, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, all men and women created equal, that general bundled package. And that, for a long time, of reason, empiricism, science, evidence, tort law, the accumulated body of both English and Western law and custom, became the thing we hung our hats on.

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- Jamie Wheal: And what we've been seeing, especially in the last decade, and then accelerating in the last several years, has been both an erosion of meaning 1.0, the Pew Research Foundation finding that nuns, they're spiritual, but not religious, are now the fastest growing demographic in the country. So we're kind of having the erode, the church scandals, all of those kind of things that have been degrading, establish belief in orthodox mainline institutional religion as sources of truth and authority.
- Jamie Wheal: And then you can also say, but at the same time, we're having these increasingly intense critiques of global modern liberalism. And we see that with the fracturing of international alliances like NATO, World Trade, IMF, World Bank. We see questions on WHO, CDC. We see all of these kinds of things happening.
- Jamie Wheal: And so, in that collapse, we're seeing people getting sucked to the extremes of fundamentalism on one side. So rather than going, "Oh, the church has collapsed and this is no longer compatible with my life." People are getting actually pulled to increasingly fringe interpretations of traditional faiths. So fundamentalism on one side and then nihilism on the other.
- Jamie Wheal: And I think that's the kind of intersection of the crisis and meaning that we're having. You could say some of it is long time overdue and worthwhile. We should be reexamining our epistemic foundations and shared consensual realities. But some of it is also stress fractures that are I think widening precisely because of the collective pressures we're all feeling right now.
- Tristan Harris: So part of what I hear you saying in connection to the meta-crisis is the meta-crisis brings these increasing threats that we're going to have to be facing. And threats, and perturbations and instability force us to make meaning of what the hell is going on. And in your framework, we have meaning 1.0, meaning 2.0 and meaning 3.0. These are meaning-making structures of how do we orient and navigate inside of these problems that are coming our way? Can you riff on that a little bit?
- Jamie Wheal: Yeah, for sure. I mean, the meaning 1.0, the traditional organized religion, offered salvation, which is profoundly important for mortal humans wrapped around Ernest Becker's fear of death. But that salvation came at the cost of inclusion. If you believed you were saved, if you didn't, you were damned, or a heretic. So that was 1.0.
- Jamie Wheal: Now 2.0, tacked to the other guardrail, and it offered inclusion at the cost of salvation. So all men are created equal. And everybody, at least in theory, has a shot, is entitled to a fair shot at life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But, God's dead. And rational material empiricism becomes enthroned as the ultimate arbiter of truth. And so the question is... And both of these as they are under stress, are susceptible to rapture ideologies, to a rapturous bypass, which is basically a solution for the 1% at the cost of 99%.
- Jamie Wheal: So traditional religion, obviously, many of those are encoded in ancient scriptures, whether that's the Book of Revelations or it's ISIS actually, with its sort of Jerusalem endgame as well. There's that sense of the moral to save the pure, will get to bypass the meta-crisis, as it were. But also, weirdly, modern liberalism is also susceptible to the bypass move of a rapture ideology. It just shows up as techno utopianism. It shows up as blockchain seasteading, we're literally going to sail into the sunset. Or

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Ray Kurzweil singularities. Well, never mind this mess we've made we're going to upload ourselves to computers, and we're going to become immortals.

Jamie Wheal: So each of those are strained with the reckoning of the meta-crisis. And the yearning temptation is to get sucked into these rapture ideologies. But all of them, no matter how sexy or flashy, whether it's Silicon Valley, or Saudi Arabia, they work for a tiny fraction of humanity, and leave the rest of us holding the bag. So they become pathological. So for meaning 3.0 the question almost by irrefutable logic is, can we have inclusive salvation? Can we come up with a means of making sense of this and acting effectively, that delivers us from evil, at the 11th hour for everyone?

Jamie Wheal: There's some beautiful things about the Enlightenment experiment. And it was basically inclusivity, it was the tentative notion of all men and women are created equal and entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, color, or creed, like notional, completely undermined at every step of the way. But an absolutely radical and novel and fragile concept to entertain. And this is counter to those rapture 1% solutions. And so the modern experiments, well, it needs to be open source, everybody needs to have access, it needs to be that kind of inclusive. It needs to be scalable, because if it's not cheap or free, then it's not a solution for the bottom 4 billion.

Jamie Wheal: And it needs to be anti-fragile, because it relies on perfect conditions like me listening to Enya with my incense, and my herbal teas, and my meditation cushion and my headspace and all my roommates out of the house for me to get to my happy place. Well, that's really quite fragile, and quite privileged. That's the same Taleb's well known phrase, anti-fragile means it gets better when things get worse. So given those criteria, salvation plus inclusion, can we create meaning 3.0 that is actually inclusive salvation? And can we do it not by top down Fiat, a pope or an imam or a president or a podcaster? But can we do it by bottoms up mobilization of an open source, Human Design centered toolkit, so that's really the premise of what we could explore together as psychosocial technology that's humane.

Aza Raskin: One of the experiences I had before the pandemic, is a friend had created an art piece called Grace Lights. And the reason I bring this up is that it shows how understanding, how human beings work at the physiological neurological level, can create these kinds of peak states. There's Grace Cathedral here in San Francisco, it's a beautiful, huge space, nondenominational. They filled the whole thing with smoke and put, I think the world's largest or at least most powerful projector at the top of the cathedral pointing down to the labyrinth underneath. And you would walk in at night and you would lay down on the labyrinth, and then there would be light tracing the labyrinth in various patterns.

Aza Raskin: And even though you knew in your mind that this was just some light going through fog, the experience of laying on that floor and looking up to the ceiling and have this godlike reach down to you was so profound, that a fourth of the people there often who had never experienced psychedelics would talk about reconnecting with a dead parent. I would look around, I'd see people crying. It's a known psychological property that it just the act of putting your head back and looking up creates the experience of awe.

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- Aza Raskin: And there's something about knowing these truths about humans that lets you design. If you understand the ergonomics of human beings, then you can fit culture technology to wrap around the affordances of humans.
- Jamie Wheal: Yeah, absolutely. And just to riff on your bit about something as simple as lights and smoke and caverns and awe. There's a couple of research papers that have come out in the last couple of years on Neolithic [Kiva]. We often derisively call them, cavemen, but the reality is they weren't. They were lean to men and mouth of cavemen, nobody lived way back in those dark, scary places. But that's where all the art was. And one study was the idea that, oh, why on earth would they crawl where the hell back in these places? There's no other benefit to it. What were they doing and why did they pick those spots? There was so many places with better light and bigger canvases, all the things. Why did they go where they went?
- Jamie Wheal: And they did an acoustic studies. And they found that not for all cave art everywhere. But in these particular instances they were studying, they were places of excessive vibro acoustic resonance. So if you were going back in there, and you were playing drums, and you were singing, you were chanting, you were doing whatever. And constricted airflow, so a very tight little cage, where you would become basically hypoxic, you would increase your CO₂, that would be a state changing, like holotropic breathwork. And the one I just read this month, I thought was fascinating. Because there's on a number of cave art, there's like these skinny little lines that bisect all of the art.
- Jamie Wheal: And then there's also situations where there's beautiful sort of Picasso like bull. So these aren't clumsy artists. But the animals often have three legs, or two heads or something like that. And what the researcher hypothesized was, Oh, we've been looking at these all wrong, because we've been using electric lights and gas lanterns like steady high lumen blast out, wash out all the shadows light. But if you actually go back to grease tallow fat torches, or camphor, the flickering ambient light, you suddenly get animation.
- Jamie Wheal: You actually get these things crawling in moving, so you're like, Holly sh** between CO₂ hypoxia, vibro acoustic bass in the caverns and flickering light movies. These are like Neolithic IMAX like. Let's get high, and go to IMAX. Back in the f*** day. So you're like, we've been geniuses at this, and yearning for these experiences and architecting and designing them for as long as we have been human. That's absolutely beautiful.
- Aza Raskin: Dolphins have been videotaped passing around a puffer fish. So quite literally puff, puff, pass, to get high, then change their state of consciousness. And of course, whales have been around 40 million years, human beings vocalizing for maybe 60,000 years, and they have cultures and song, pop songs that a whale in one part of the world will come to another part, it'll catch on and then the all the whales in Australia will start seeing this new song. This seems to be as you say, cross species. And I know in part two of your book, actually, I think you should sort of walk through the cookbook for how you apply human centered design to as you call it, the meaning crisis.

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- Jamie Wheal: So how do we meet the mandate of the open source, scalable and anti-fragile, design centered approach to building meaning 3.0. And playfully called that the Alchemist Cookbook and that sense was, if we want to be able to create healing inspiration and connection in a way that everybody has access to that works and we can start experimenting with, one of the best places to look is evolutionary drivers. If you're relying on some fancy bit of smart tech, if you're relying on a highly scheduled tightly controlled esoteric compound, or pharmaceutical. If you're relying on any of these other things, those are actually kind of fragile and definitely not scalable. So those don't meet our criteria.
- Jamie Wheal: But things as simple as respiration, varying the rate, rhythm and depth of our breath, can completely shift our consciousness. So you can if you're stressed, and you just need to calm down you can engage in super slow vagal breathing which signals to your body, Hey, rest and digest, everything is safe. You can lower your heart rate, you can lower your stress hormones, and you can calm down. So you can down regulate. If on the other hand, you're about to get up on the blocks to swim, or to base jump off a thing or to pose to your true love or step up on a stage to give a speech, you can up regulate. You're like I need to be at my best and I'm going to hyperventilate or breathe quickly and powerfully to bring my nervous system up.
- Tristan Harris: This is Tony Robbins jumping on the trampoline for a minute before he jumps out in front of 6000 people.
- Jamie Wheal: Exactly and ultimately, if you're looking to transcend waking state consciousness. Hyperventilation combined with breath holds is one of the simplest ways you blow off a lot of CO₂, you turn your blood pH alkaline, and it creates a host of body brain and cognitive sensations up to and including complete out of body experiences and access to interior subjective psychological mythopoetic archetypal experiences. So that's just one.
- Jamie Wheal: And another one that is very strongly encoded as sexuality, it is the strongest driver we have outside of breathing and eating. The very next thing that is on our genetic imprint is to procreate. And that is at the root of untold amounts of human grief and suffering. And on the other hand, if we can just set aside the kind of titillation or the volatility of the content and just look at it, like an anthropologist from space.
- Jamie Wheal: You'd be like, okay, if we can be informed about it, we can take all of that neurochemical enticement and encoding and jump the tracks and put it over to healing, inspiration, and connection. And to that you can add embodiment, and then music and substances. So if you're tracking along, that's what we would call the big five of the five, three of them are sex, drugs, rock and roll.
- Tristan Harris: And just to recap that, again, the big five meaning making ingredients in Jamie's Alchemist Cookbook, are breathing, movement, music, sexuality, and substances.
- Jamie Wheal: And everybody from Robin Dunbar at Oxford, who is most famous for his Dunbar number of 150 people in a group, to Jared Diamond, the Pulitzer winner for Guns, Germs, and Steel. They've all coalesced around this idea of saying, actually, it's not like pearl clutching parents in the 1960s were like Elvis and the Beatles and The Grateful Dead and the birth control pill are going to be the bane of civilization is

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going to undo us. Diamond and Dunbar and others have actually really advanced a really compelling case that is actually sex, drugs, rock and roll music, dance, these were the birthplaces of civilization.

Jamie Wheal: These were the actual psycho technologies that bonded us, that mended us, that inspired us, and it's actually time to dust them off, reclaim them, and share them. So they're we're all fundamentally literate about the workings of ourselves. And we back to E. O. Wilson. If in fact, we have paleolithic emotions, and medieval institutions and godlike technologies, and how do we develop this divine wisdom? The answers have been with us all along. And it's a matter of going back and reclaiming them, and integrating them together, I think that provides our best way forward.

Jamie Wheal: And it's also profoundly empowering and inclusive, because it doesn't mean some super smart, somebody just discovered a thing. And now we need to get forced to do it. It's like, no, no, no, no. You've got this in your body, you got this in your culture, you got this in your community. We just all need to go back and bring it above the waterline again.

Tristan Harris: So, let's connect this to technology. We're interested, obviously, in this podcast for the big redesign project, and getting our philosophy straight. As we're thinking about, okay, if we were to do this the right way and not just the ways that we've highlighted in The Social Dilemma, and for many episodes in this podcast, what would technology look like, if it was developed from the perspective of meaning 3.0?

Jamie Wheal: Yeah. Perversely, I think our best case studies are incels, ISIS, the alt right, some of these fringe ideas were better off dying in the crib, but they're not. They're actually catching fire. And instead of just being one lone walnut in my town, I now find 1000 people around the world. And now we're a thing and now we share and we cross pollinate. And we propagate and the same with any extremist recruiting strategies, of like, hey, you're isolated and alone, but you're not, where your friends. And then relationship, community first is quite often the way in.

Jamie Wheal: And then we see your pain, we feel your pain, we share your pain, and that's profound on a human level. I've got relief here. And this is true for AA&A any of those kind of recovery movements and things like that. And then this question of like, and now what do we do about that shed pain? Now, of course, extremist movements create the other and vilify the other. It's migrants, it's people of different beliefs. It's fill in the blank for who the other is. But the question is, if we now say Okay, so first established community, then acknowledge the traumas, basically that the bewilderment of existing at that intersection of the meta crisis and the meaning crisis.

Jamie Wheal: Find those folks say, "Hey, you're not alone, and you're not crazy, the world is." And now what do we do about it? Instead of making that move to the other, to blame, we expand our tent to reflect back us, and what are we going to do about it? And a couple of easy simple examples are things like the Transition Towns movement and the Two Kilowatts Society, which you turned me on to actually when you recommended ministry for the future. But that sense of like Transition Towns is a global movement. It started in England, but it's popped up all around the world.

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- Jamie Wheal: And it's basically just saying, "Hey, where you live, where we live matters." And we are fragmented, isolated, and alone from our neighbors, and let's remit by our regional tribes. Let's reconnect with the people we live next to the people our kids go to school with. Where does our food come from? Where does our water come from? How do we deal with fires and floods and all the things when they happen because FEMA and federal or governmental organizations are strapped and failing?
- Jamie Wheal: So how do we just knit and it's not even prepper based, it's a celebration, it's grieving, it's building, it's creating, it's networking, and it's communicating. And when you see that that's possible, it becomes more possible. So instead of me being the lone walnut utopian in my community, thinking there's got to be a better way, but collapsing in despair because it doesn't seem like anybody else is asking the same questions. I now find 1,000 and 10,000 and a million people like me, and the Two Kilowatt crew that originated in Switzerland, and they've all committed to be living at two kilowatts of energy consumption or lower.
- Tristan Harris: In here, Jamie's talking about the 2000-watt Society, which is committed to decreasing their consumption 2000 watts of energy per year. And for reference, an average US citizen consumes about 12,000 watts per year.
- Jamie Wheal: Their whole premise was, are we going to change the world by riding our bikes and putting solar panels on our roofs and doing backyard gardens? No, we're not. But what we might be able to do is via positive pro social networks, say, "Hey, we're doing this, and it doesn't feel like austerity. In fact, we are actually healthier, we are happier. And we are having increased quality of life versus decreased." And I think six of the 10 maybe cities that were voted best places to live in the EU, are at least in part, subscribing to the 2000-Watt Society parameters. And shows now, instead of a canary in a coal mine, we've got a phoenix in the fire. We're saying, "Look, there can be life after the ashes." And instead of global humanism, it's bioregional tribalism.
- Jamie Wheal: Most forms of tribalism, we think of bad because it's based on race. It's based on creed. It's based on something that is divisive. But if you say, "Hey, instead of think globally, buy locally." Like that old whole foods bumper sticker, it's like grieve globally, but thrive locally. Pay attention to the wound of the world really taken and grok, what is going on. Because there's no dodging, but at the same time, thrive locally. I would love to see more of that.
- Jamie Wheal: Because right now, many of the innovations into meaning 3.0 are in the dark arts, what we're seeing is, we're seeing in the collapse of meaning 1.0 and 2.0 nature abhors a vacuum but so does culture. And so I think if we're going to be pursuing that idea of meaning 3.0 and inclusive salvation, we have to be offering examples and exemplars via distributed tag, via mesh worked communities all around the world. So you don't have to get to critical mass where your zip code is or in the accident of your biological family.
- Jamie Wheal: So you can find your brothers and sisters. You can like, I have affinity with these folks. But we also have an open source toolkit. We're not all being told to build the same thing, but we are being shown the Lego blocks. And we can trust that they snap together and they hold together they work.

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Tristan Harris: Let's take an example of something like the Incel community, which for those who don't know, is the Involuntary Celibate community. The group that does not voluntarily choose to be celibate, but feels that they are disenfranchised from society. I'm just thinking there we are in the user interface. There's Reddit, there's Facebook and we're in the Incel group. Obviously, one of the fundamental problems is the disembodiment of people. Of course, you're going to sit there feeling like you're excluded from society and having physical sexual intimate connection with others or with women.

Tristan Harris: If you are spending all your time on Reddit, but Reddit doesn't put buttons on the screen that says, "Here's the button to host, a block party in your neighborhood." It doesn't put some other button that gets you off the screen. We talked also about next door and things like this, but do you have any ideas we're just riffing here about ways that we would reintroduce that embodiment and reintroduce some of those building blocks that would get people into a more meaningful form of belonging that celebrates their shared grievances?

Jamie Wheal: Well, look, I've been aware an oura ring, the biometric device for the last year or two. And one of the things it does, I'm never happy when it tells me, but it's like, "Hey, you need to stretch your legs." Like, "Time to get outside couch boy." And those kind of things, if we're talking about the next 5 to 10 years of integrated tech, the multiverse as the big tech players are looking to move into that kind of space. I think that for sure, there could be some of those sedentary eyeball strain, take a break, go outside warnings.

Jamie Wheal: But beyond just those, they could actually lead into what you were just describing. Go hug a friend, go walk a dog, go smell a flower, watch a sunset. Like ding, ding, ding, it's sunset did you know? Get outside in the next 10 minutes. There could be all sorts of fun ways to do that. But I think the first thing we have to do is, I think the power of most of these fringe and fractured movements, the ones that are not just picking up stragglers who are feeling like they're left behind the bus of modernity, but the people who they're sweeping them up, they're radicalizing them and they're pulling them further from any each shared sense of collective humanity, reciprocity and action, is to acknowledge the state of play.

Jamie Wheal: And the reason that Q, I mean Q is so bafflingly falsifiable and laughably incoherent. You go like, how is this even a thing? How did this get beyond like 12 weird dudes on Reddit? And yet it has. And it's not actually because of the incisive clarity of their analysis of what to do, but it hits it out of the park on saying, "You kind of have suspected that something's a little off about the society we're living in. You've kind of suspected that whoa, maybe this isn't all sweetness and light and maybe we're not all going to get our shot at the good life. And you've kind of suspected that game has been rigged all along."

Jamie Wheal: And to do is check those boxes. And that is a visceral sense. And that can be more or less informed by evidence and facts in reality. Or it can just be a spidy sense at a tribal primate level. You first move people by actually acknowledging what they feel to be truthy. Anybody who is aspiring to demagoguery these days is beating the drum of collective grievance. And many of their insights aren't wrong. If you really did a

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play by play on Bernie and Trump in 2015 to '16, their critiques of why the common man, why the working guy was getting the shaft were remarkably similar.

- Jamie Wheal: It was the final 10%, what then ought we do about it, that was massively divergent. And so I'm seeing this, here in Austin, it appears to be a hotbed of bubbling and metastasizing QAnon, anti-vax libertarian, God, Guns & Guts. It's not that I agree with the logic, the selection of evidence, the validity of the truth claims all those things. But at a visceral level, it's important to I think take time in that 90% of like, you're not wrong to think that things are badly off. And that many people who are demanding or asserting authority actually aren't trustworthy or worthy leaders to follow.
- Jamie Wheal: One of the first things in Aikido, which was an inclusive martial art, the idea was dissolve the conflict with your enemy. The first thing you do, literally the very first movement when someone's attacking you is you step out of the attack so you don't get brained and you step towards them, not away from them. And you turn and you look in the same direction that they were looking. You literally take their perspective and then you take your hand and you pin their head to your shoulder. So now not only have you taken their perspective, but you've taken control of their perspective and you're sharing it with them. And from that place, you can put them anywhere you want.
- Jamie Wheal: You can dance with them, you can drop them to the mat. You can flip them over your shoulder. You can do anything you want once you control the head. And I think in this epistemic warfare, it is as always, and as it always has been a battle for hearts and minds. And if we meet our adversaries, if we take their perspectives and if we leave them feeling seen, met, validated, and acknowledged, then with gentleness, with grace, with compassion, with whatever's needed or decisive violence, you can then take the next steps that need to be taken.
- Jamie Wheal: And we saw a little bit of this. I've seen in social the last couple of weeks, the whole like I'm anti-authority and I still got the Vax. That's an example. That's to say, "Hey, all my friends and neighbors and my crazy uncle in upstate New York, I get you. I don't trust this system either, but I'm doing the other thing that you have assigned in your manneken breakdown as the ultimate evil, but I'm actually going to try and bridge." Now, is there a virtue signaling that gets sucked into those? Does it get co-opted? Yes. All those things also happen. But to me that is a little blip of the kind of thing we could potentially all be doing more of.
- Tristan Harris: Yeah. When you were using that example of Aikido and design that says, "Yes." Or affirm or reflects back. Positively affirms. Yes. That is an experience that people are having. I was thinking about the current way that social media platforms implement fact checking and community guidelines, where, if you basically say the word ivermectin or here's breakthrough case, people are having the experience of, "Hey, your poster, your video channel has been disabled by YouTube. And this decision is not repealable."
- Tristan Harris: Of course, people are not going to feel meta affirmed and it's going to heighten. Of course I would feel very shut down and angry if that had happened to me. And it's the opposite of saying, like you said, aikido design with a yes, to the underlying

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sentiment and then reveal the complexity. And one of the first examples that came to my mind is the one you mentioned, that's been going around my circles with Facebook profile photo frame, where you basically add this frame to your profile saying, I have a healthy skepticism of authority. And I took the vaccine.

Tristan Harris: Another one are these Venn diagrams that I think you and I were exchanging during the high to the middle of the pandemic a year ago. I have one in front of me right now, it's imagine a four circle Venn diagram. And it says, "Here's the four pillars of the Venn diagram." The first one is people taking COVID 19 seriously, people worried about the expansion of authoritarian government policies, people acknowledging that the pandemic is highlighting deep seeded structural racism and injustice, and people very concerned about impending, economic devastation and fear of too many lockdowns.

Tristan Harris: And the point is, there's a center point that says you can be here at the center of them. And if I think about humane technologies that are Aikido-ing and expanding, like you were sort of saying, it's that inclusive salvation or at least some kind of inclusive meaning. You can take that thing that's correct. Which is, yeah, maybe there are breakthrough vaccinated patients and we actually really need to look at that. It's incredibly important. And we can do a calculus on how bad is COVID versus say how bad say vaccine side effects are. It's some kind of yes anding to the experience. And I was just thinking, since we're in this design exercise, how would you design social media differently? The current approach by social media platforms is an approach called reduce, remove, or inform.

Tristan Harris: So reduces sort of shadow banning or minimizing the spread. So if you use the word ivermectin or you use some word that's QAnon or something like that, invisibly, there might be a dampening of the virality or spread of that piece that platforms might include. That's reduced. The second one is removed. So this is just use the word QAnon boom you're de-platformed the entire platform or your post just are hidden. And then the last one is informed, which is, this claim is not true, or here's a fact checked article that's labeling or informing or that kind of thing. But all three of those approaches are not inclusive meaning making.

Tristan Harris: They're all forms of saying no. And it's very tricky because how do you introduce this complexity, which requires a kind of wisdom and you have to be able to instill then all the different perspectives and sort of show a meta perspective that's greater than that. But I'm just wondering, I'm imagining some resource in which every time you talk about one of these topics, it showed you that kind of yes. And more inclusive view of some of the meaning making frames that people are using and then standing on the top of shoulders of giants instead of there being just a yes, no, on a single point.

Jamie Wheal: Yeah. Well, I think the simplest thing to do is if you think of a music festival. Here in Austin, we have Austin City Limits. It's a bunch of bands playing on different stages in this big, beautiful park every October. And I think the simplest thing is play a better song, make art that is so delightful and compelling. Banksy has done more to rock people's world and change their thinking with his gorilla art than any earnest policy wonk holding forth on what we ought to do. So I think absolutely it is on us to tell

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better stories and make better art. And rather than telling people that they're wrong in those stories, reminding them how right we can be.

Jamie Wheal: So that notion for me is for instance things we're doing right. We've been playing with a game WhyAnon to culture jam QAnon and like, if you want a really fun conspiracy matrix like story, then let's tell a good one. Let's tell a true one. And let's invite people into that same dopamine rush. I'm solving puzzles, I'm doing my own research. I'm trusting the plan, like play with that, not in a wink, trickster, it punk it gorilla theater. And we're even exploring experiential plays on Broadway. We're partnering with a group that has the largest fund on Broadway. They've backed three of the last Tony award winners.

Jamie Wheal: And the idea is what are some interactive experiential stories that can start on the stage and go beyond that. Make good art. So play a better song, play something that just grabs people's attention and entices or entrances or delights. And then tell better stories and not where we've gone wrong, but where we've always been right. And remind other, "Hey, we know how to do this." "Hey, we can be better than our last tantrum or breakdown." And, "Hey, we've got this together."

Aza Raskin: I think this is a great time to reify. I've just played through WhyAnon. I now have this cookbook. Walk me through. So there I am. I have these tools, I'm ready to do a meaning 3.0 local community culture. What do I do? Like what does that look like?

Jamie Wheal: Yeah, that's such a fun question. And the short answer is I have no idea writ large. All I know are things we're fired up to try and I'm sure hope that other people get equally fired up to try similar things and totally different things. And again, back to Dunbar and Robin Dunbar did a really neat study with the song, Bushman of the Kalahari. They engage in TRS dances. So they would drum saying dance and move around a fire, potentially with sleep deprivation, fasting, all the techniques, the common and available techniques of state induction. And they would get their yaya's out and afterwards they would all feel better. And what he noticed was it wasn't an exclamation point, or it wasn't solely an exclamation point at the end of a good day or a good hunt or a good month.

Jamie Wheal: They actually increased the frequency of their trance dances when things were hotter. So they actually used them as a psychosocial technology. When we're starting to get a little prickly, a little salty, a little sick of each other, we throw down and wiped the Etch A Sketch clean. So batch forgiveness, because I think it's essential. Clearly when we really bang into each other, we need to slow down and process that one on one. We might even need mediation from somebody wise and trusted.

Jamie Wheal: But there is a whole bunch of irritation and grit in the social gears that really, we don't actually need to talk about it. We actually need to get past it. And so the notion of psycho technologies that provide batch forgiveness. Mandela pioneered The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. They've been attempted in other places with mixed success. But I think the premise is really beautiful. How do we mend and go forward after a cataclysm? And we could even blend it with Dunbar and creates something even more fun. Like what's the groove and reconciliation committee? How can we learn to sweat our pros?

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- Jamie Wheal: How can we learn to atone and digest our grief and make a joyful sound? And that's that church of Beyonce. That's the Grace cathedral. Like we've got examples. We've got examples all around us. And I think it's just an opportunity for us once again, to realize that, and that to me is the potential phase change. Because all the graphs showing all the things right now don't look great. And it's really easy to break our hearts or lose our minds with the burden of that realization. And can we not just walk each other home, provide each other company along the way, but can we dance each other home?
- Jamie Wheal: We had a lived experience of this because we just did a gathering, exploring meaning 3.0 up in the mountains of Colorado. And we had the folk fusion band, Rising Appalachia with us, which is two sisters, Leah and Chloe Song and their band mates. And they've been carrying forward, the American songbook. Like old school Celtic Scott's Irish stuff, Appalachian stuff. And their songs are almost 201. They're redemption songs. They are about the pain and the heartache and the heartbreak, the bad luck and the set downs.
- Tristan Harris: I fought the law and the law won. You want to talk about distrust for authority baked into the folk gospel soul blues, jazz traditions in is a very anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment band. It's fiercely individualistic, but it is also transformative and it's redemptive and it doesn't seek to bypass the pain. It actually starts there.
- Tristan Harris: And in fact, the chorus that get everybody up off their feet that get, in, back in the day, flicking their lighters. Sadly now holding up their phones. But the chorus are always like, I am acknowledging the deep pathos, the pain and the suffering and the injustice and the irreducible illogic of this whole thing we're in. And I rise up singing. And that's where you get Beyonce. That's where you get Lady Gaga. The, I'm a survivors. It is archetypal for us to celebrate in the midst of our suffering. And what you don't see in most of our current culture wars is a playful trickster sense of humor and a redemptive joyful sound as to what do we do in spite of all this?
- Tristan Harris: We're getting wrapped around the axle in that, in the intersection of the meaning crisis and the meta crisis. And we're getting overwhelmed by our grief and grievances versus hate. And don't take this too seriously. And hey by the way, there's a much funner jam we can share together. And quite often it is an artist. It is somebody testifying. Who reminds us, it is possible to wail with it. Cornell West at Harvard, he said something beautifully. He said something like, "Courageously bearing witness till the worms get your body."
- Tristan Harris: He said like, "Boom." And living to sing about, he said, "Boom, that's blues." A beautiful tradition. And we're all living the blues right now. The question is, are we doing it to music or are we doing it in the ditch? And to me, that's the notion of making better art. The songs that remind us of what's in us to be, and what must be done.
- Tristan Harris: Jamie Wheal is a leading expert in evidence-based peak performance. He's The founder and executive director of the Flow Genome Project, an international organization dedicated to the research and training of human performance. Jamie's the author of two books, Stealing Fire: How Silicon Valley, the Navy SEALs, and Maverick Scientists Are Revolutionizing the Way We Live and Work. And most

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recently, Recapture the Rapture: Rethinking God, Sex, and Death in a World That's Lost Its Mind. You can find information about Recapture the Rapture along with tools for building your own version of meaning 3.0 at recapturetherapture.com. And Jamie will be joining us for a live discussion and Q&A at our podcast club. Details are at humanetech.com.

Tristan Harris: Your Undivided Attention is produced by the Center for Humane Technology. Our executive producer is Stephanie Lepp and our Associate Producer is Noor Al-Samarrai. Dan Kedmey is our editor at large. Original music and sound design by Ryan and Hays Holladay. And a special thanks to the whole Center for Humane Technology team for making this podcast possible. And a very special thanks goes to our generous lead supporters, including the Omidyar Network, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and the Evolve Foundation among many others. I'm Tristan Harris. And if you made it all the way here, let me just give one more thank you to you for giving us your undivided attention.