

my attempt at a [minimally-viable sufficiently-anticonfusing primer] on [improving baseline well-being by many orders of magnitude] via [meditation]

contact me on twitter (@corbindreams)
or email me (top right corner)

music to listen to while reading this: [playlist]

"Have you ever experienced a moment of bliss? On the rapids of inspiration maybe, your mind tracing the shapes of truth and beauty? Or in the pulsing ecstasy of love? Or in a glorious triumph achieved with true friends? Or in a conversation on a vine-overhung terrace one star-appointed night? Or perhaps a melody smuggled itself into your heart, charming it and setting it alight with kaleidoscopic emotions? Or when you prayed, and felt heard?"

- nick bostrom, utopia sci-fi letter

"The woodpile is so beautiful, about all the joy and beauty that I can stand. I am afraid to turn around and face the mountains, for fear they will overpower me. But I did look, and I am astounded. Everyone must get to experience a profound state like this. I feel totally peaceful. I have lived all my life to get here, and I feel I have come home. I am complete."

- alexander shulgin, mdma journal

it turns out it's possible to feel like this all the time. not just for a moment, but as our baseline.

it turns out humans can improve baseline wellbeing by crazy orders of magnitude, by investigating and undoing particular 10-40hz tensing events which are the correlate of all suffering.

but it's not super simple, and statistically takes a few thousand hours of advanced meditation, and it's hidden by lots of terrible pedagogy and fuzzy theory and weird poems and antihelpful translation. the field is very nascent, both in pedagogy/metalearning^[1] and in science/tech^[3].

i want to help fix that! and i love yapping about it! i think this is the most important unsolved-ish problem of our time.^[2]

currently, there are almost zero anticonfusing comprehensive legible explanations/resources. hopefully this document serves as a good primer for people that wanna know more!

apologies, disclaimers

sorry about the citation numbers being messy.

epistemic status + tennis analogy

[TODO: fill out more outline from notes] [TODO: look at bookmarks for more tweets]

bad pedagogy TODO: change title

power law, secrets

the answer is easier than the question / traversing dead ends, blindspots, nuances, misconceptions, edge cases

end-gaining & reversing causality

flaky breakthroughs

thinking/analysis/theory is useful (sports science)

"somehow, wow!"

it turns out that meditation is powerful, it can produce transformative outlier experiences, empirically reproducibly. ^{[4][5][6][7]}

some people have outlier wellbeing as a baseline; humans can be almost-continually happy without crashing. ^{[12][13][14][15]}

it seems like most people with crazy outlier wellbeing get there through meditation. it seems like this is the only empirically reproducible path to outlier wellbeing, currently. ^[?]

"ow! how ow?"

it seems like certain 10-40hz tensing events cause ~all suffering

Shades of Awake Experience



Dissociated States Orthogonal to Awakening

Sense of self can change in depending on the spatial configurations of craving and aversion

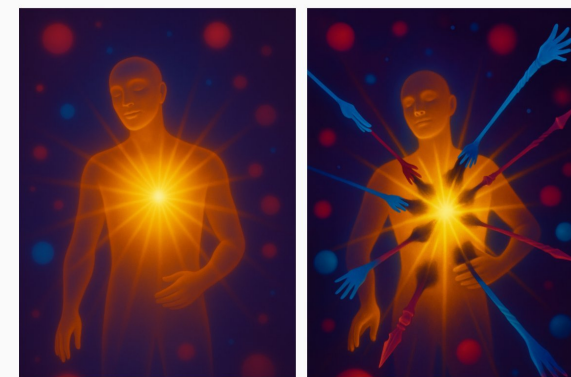
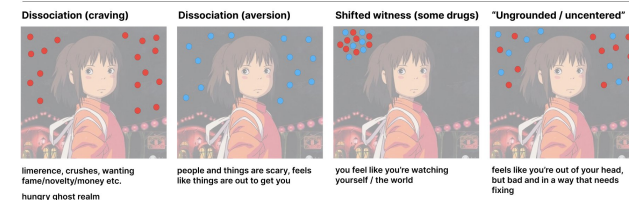


Image inspiration: @this_is_silvia

@ChrisChipMonk
chrislak.in.blog/default

many nick tweets, romeo blog post, some convos w bayes romeo and the traditional

"no ow, wow!"

base layer is joy, peace, love, connection, wholeness, meaning, flow, heaven, divine, beauty ^[11]

apparently this is what we're all looking for!

why is no one talking about how good this is? why is everyone saying it's only a 10% improvement?

so so grateful that the physics of consciousness turned out this way ^{nick obv}

We offer no explanation as to why these architectures seem to work; we attribute their success, as all else, to

divine benevolence. ^[16]

although, prob smth to do with thermodynamics^[17]

[logarithmic positive valence graph]

[nick tanha diagram]

[chris metta diagram]

"now how?"

warnings, hazards 0 it turns out that tinkering with your mind, trying to do trust falls into the universe/God/etc can open up a very big can of worms. there can be many unforeseen n-th order side effects, especially with bad imprecise pedagogy. ^[7]

the endgoal of meditation is to remove suffering j– via undoing the 10-40hz tensing events which cause suffering j– via investigation/insight j– via sensory clarity j– via experiences like "cessation" j– via methods such as getting into certain high-positive-valence states called the jhanas

phd, few thousand hours, div ii tennis (reproducibility + length) ^{buddha 6 years 5?}

getting caught up in progress, models

reifying maps, models

direct vs exploratory <https://claude.ai/chat/5a3f068c-0e80-4008-b11a-15b2cea950b8> ^[18]

mctb

thisdell

nick stage theories

interior castle

fetters

many paths up the mountain ^{nick teacher describe}

safety, dry path vs wet path, scenic route

a commonly recommended path (neo-theravada) IFS (explain) metta (anime girl) jhanas jhana descriptions jhana diy resources jhana debates vipassana nondual

fetters inquiry not true to history (?) / weird vibes but lots of efficacy seemingly

[jhana visualizations thisdell]

threefold ^[8]

theories, frames

unclogging, untangling, jesus, KFP

multi agent predictive processing theory of mind

coherence, ifs, focusing, locally optimal

base layer of personality as well

vasocomputation

mark lippmann lots of stuff

nick evolution tweet (20250924 ?)

misc. stuff

it turns out the buddha was right, four noble truths ^{wystan}

misconceptions

[TODO: i should standardize my negative/positive statements for misconceptions]

it's not philosophy/religion or CBT-esque stuff, it's more like tennis/golf, it's robust physical physiological phenomenological empirical reproducible, it's talking about actual micro physical/mental motions/tensions, it's not ideas

it's hard, crazy, out of this world

fears

misconceptions // "somehow, wow!"

it's just mindfulness and/or accepting the present moment

it's just temporary relief it's not super powerful it's just focusing on the breath

misconceptions // "ow! how ow?"

life is suffering ^{romeo tweet, nick + vividness 99.99 vs 100} just dont care about this, focus on the fact that we have outlier wellbeing ^{nick you can choose to not blink out}

desire is the root of suffering

misconceptions // "no ow, wow!"

"nirvana" and "enlightenment" (abiding centerlessness)

"no suffering" wtf does that mean

dissociative/numb, blissed out

perfect personality/behavior

no motivation / no wants / makes you not care

suffering is useful

need sad to be happy

nihilism and emptiness

"you are awareness" "everything is God" / "you're merging with God" (nick thisdell stage 3)

misconceptions // "now how?"

"you cant try to be happy" dont focus on suffering forcing some of it may be familiar "you" are not real (sorta true but shut up) endgaining & reversing causality you're deleting the self (sorta true but shut up) clearing thoughts, suppressing emotions (wrong, but yes inner critic goes away) goals are okay/good!! spiritual materialism "you" cant "do" the nondoing there's nothing to do / already enlightened

postface

references

[TODO: create archives of all these links] [TODO: write sentence / copypaste excerpt for each of these references]

[1] <https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1808246328142749864>

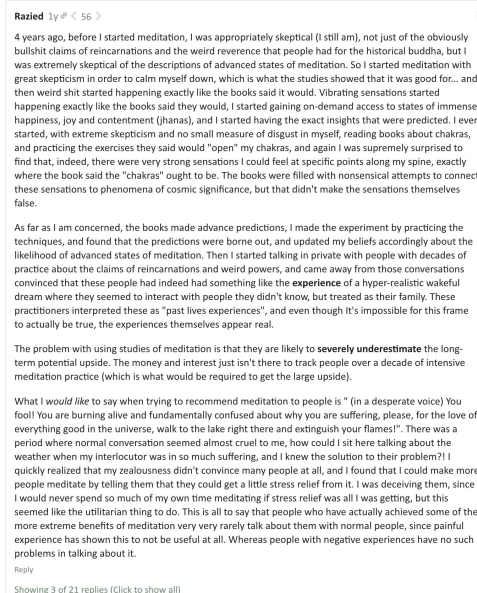
[2] <https://x.com/QualiaNerd/status/1970924629607797205>

"Burn alive with the valence sign inverted." To us now, a cool-sounding phrase - nothing more. But let there be no doubt that if you possessed the technology to actually do it, and do it consistently - then the importance of the totality of all other technological improvement from stone age to the hypothetical Dyson spheres would amount to nothing more than a rounding error next to it.

[3] <https://opentheory.net/2023/07/principles-of-vasocomputation-a-unification-of-buddhist-phenomenology-active-inference-and-physical-reflex-part-i/>

[4] There's some nontrivial amount of emerging research in the neurological correlates of meditative states called jhanas. The Meditation Research Program at Harvard Medical School [<https://meditation.mgh.harvard.edu/publications/>] is doing a lot of neuro research into advanced meditation. Any of their publications from the past 2 years seem pretty cool. I think their stuff might be the best studies currently (and I think it's the best stuff to cite when trying to convince people I'm not crazy, but obviously I think the field is super early/nascent, thus much of the actual frontier theories/research are way less tractable/legible than what's in academic journals right now).

[5] <https://x.com/nosilverv/status/1708818008552972757>

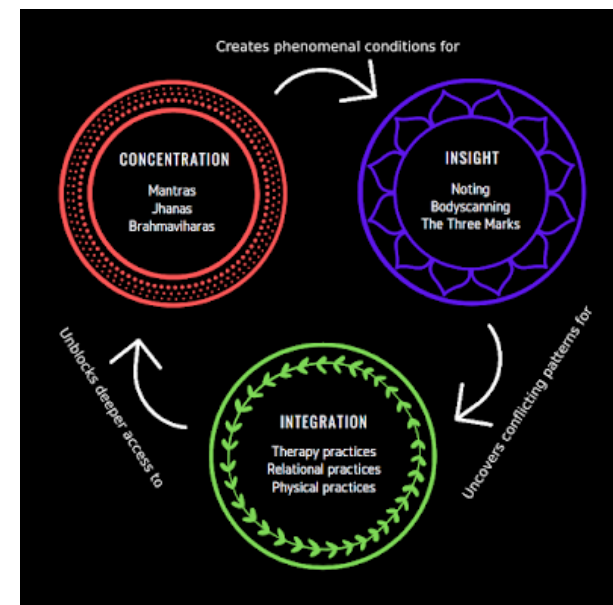


[6] some slightly comprehensive stats + description on Jhourney & jhanas <https://gwern.net/doc/psychiatry/meditation/2024-asparouhova.pdf>

[7] an interview with a Jhourney student <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMK2PWqUMnI>

[8] <https://x.com/blissbrah/status/1968385394497765675>

[9] <https://neuroticgradientdescent.blogspot.com/2021/03/threefold-training.html>



[10] two sections in Mark Lippmann's book; <https://meditationbook.page/#risks-maximally-cautious-warnings-directives-first-> and <https://meditationbook.page/#but-what-actually-makes-it-risky-how-do-risks-obtai>

[11] <https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1869554247890772138>

[12] <https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1825943586741047749>

[13] <https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1803857634749259919>

[14] <https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1396533736431185920>

[15] <https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1392551239938871299>

[16] Noam Shazeer. *GLU Variants Improve Transformer*. February 2020 <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2002.05202v1>

[17] look at the first message from me <https://chatgpt.com/share/68d4ba46-c0c0-8012-a9c9-601e6b530c56> (the excerpt is from beffjezos)

[18] Wystan Bryant-Scott has a playful translation
[\[https://x.com/WystanTBS/status/1818716817483088211\]](https://x.com/WystanTBS/status/1818716817483088211) of the "four noble truths" that goes like,

"Ow! // How ow? // No ow! Wow! // Now how?"

and I really like this translation because not only is it silly and playful, but it also helps achieve this effect:

"At least now it is clear that we have no idea what is going on, which forms a much better foundation for investigating on our own." (quote from [\[https://neuroticgradientdescent.blogspot.com/2020/01/mistranslating-buddha.html?m=1\]](https://neuroticgradientdescent.blogspot.com/2020/01/mistranslating-buddha.html?m=1))