my attempt at a [minimally-viable sufficientlyanticonfusing 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 starappointed 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







Secure is default

Insecurities are learned "on top"

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. [?]

the endgoal of meditation is to remove suffering $\rm i-via$ undoing the 10-40hz tensing events which cause suffering $\rm i-via$ investigation/insight $\rm i-via$ sensory clarity $\rm i-via$ experiences like "cessation" $\rm i-via$ 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 vippassana 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?"

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"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/1808246 328142749864
- [2] https://x.com/QualiaNerd/status/1970924629
 607797205

"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/17088180085 52972757

4 years ago, before I started meditation, I was appropriately skeptical (I still am), not just of the obviously bulishir claims of reincarnations and the weidr reverence that people had for the historical buddha, but I was extremely skeptical of the descriptions of advanced states of meditation. So I started meditation with great skepticism in order to calim myself down, which is what the studies showed that it was good for.. and then weid shift started happening exactly like the books said through Vibrating sensations started happening exactly like the books said through claims and create the propriate product of the propriate product of the propriate product of the propriate product of the product of the propriate product of the product of the

As far as I am concerned, the books made advance predictions, I made the experiment by practicing the techniques, and found that the predictions were borne out, and updated my beliefs accordingly about that the chiefund of advanced states of meditation. Then I started talking in private with people with decades of practice about the claims of reincarrations and weiter glowers, and came away from those conversations convinced that these people had indeed had something like the experience of a hyper-realistic wakeful drawn where they seemed to interact with people they didn't know, but travated as their family. These practitioners interpreted these as "past lives experiences", and even though it's impossible for this frame to actually be true. The experiences of a hyper-realistic valeeful and the control of the control of

The problem with using studies of meditation is that they are likely to **severely underestimate** the longterm potential upside. The money and interest just isn't there to track people over a decade of intensive meditation practice (which is what would be required to get the large upside).

What I would like to say when trying to recommend meditation to people is "(in a desperate voice) You fool! You are a burning alive and fundamentally confused about why you are suffering, please, for the love of everything good in the universe, walk to the lake right there and extinguish your flames!". There was a period where normal conversation seemed almost cruel to me, how could i sit here taiking about the weather when my interlocutor was inso much suffering, and I knew the solution to their problem??! I quickly realized that my zealousness didn't convince many people at all, and! found that! Could make more people meditate by telling them that they could get a little stesser seller from it. I was deceiving them, since I vouid never spend so much of my own time meditating if stress relief was all I was getting, but this seemed like the utilitation thing to A. Dhis is all to say that people who had actually achieved some of the more extreme benefits of meditation very very rarely talk about them with normal people, since painful experience has shown this to not be useful at all. Whereas people with negative experiences have no such problems in talking about it.

Showing 3 of 21 replies (Click to show all)

- [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/19683853944 97765675

[9] https://neuroticgradientdescent.blogsp
 ot.com/2021/03/threefold-training.html

- CONCENTRATION
 Mantras
 Jhanas
 Brahmaviharas

 INSIGHT
 Noting
 Bodyscanning
 The Three Marks

 INTEGRATION
 Therapy practices
 Relational practices
 Physical practices
 Physical practices
- [10] two sections in Mark Lippmann's book; https:
 //meditationbook.page/#risks-maximally
 -cautious-warnings-directives-first- and
 https://meditationbook.page/#but-what-actua
 lly-makes-it-risky-how-do-risks-obtai
- [11] https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1869554
 247890772138
- [12] https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1825943
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- [13] https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1803857
 634749259919
- [14] https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1396533
 736431185920
- [15] https://x.com/nickcammarata/status/1392551 239938871299
- [16] Noam Shazeer. GLU Variants Improve Transformer. February 2020 https://arxiv.org/pdf/2002.052 02v1
- [17] look at the first message from me https://chatgp t.com/share/68d4ba46-c0c0-8012-a9c9-601e6 b530c56 (the excerpt is from beffjezos)

- [18] Wystan Bryant-Scott has a playful translation [https://x.com/WystanTBS/status/1818716 817483088211] 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])