

Sam Harris on Social Media & Leaving Twitter | Dr. Sam Harris & Dr. Andrew Huberman

This may seem like a divergence but I and many other people are very curious about a recent decision that you made which was to close your account on Twitter Um You still have an Instagram account I noticed but I never I mean my team manages that I I've never friendlier over Instagram I've been there a lot I've never seen it So it's pretty good actually imagine what would happen if you did They they're doing a good job with it Um But your decision to close your account on Twitter um I think grabbed a lot of eyes and ears and um there's a lot of questions about why it was a very large account you know um it correlated with a number of things that for the outsider people might be wondering about um you know new leadership uh new you know people who had been booted off brought back on or at least invited back on and so on Uh You are certainly not obligated to explain your behavior to me uh or anybody else um for that matter But I'm curious if you might share with us um what the motivation was um for taking the account down and and uh how you feel in the absence of of uh I mean your thumbs presumably are are freed up to do other things I was getting like an arthritic right thumb I think And if you don't mind sharing I think there's a there's a lot of cur about you and your your routines you've been very generous in sharing that your knowledge Um And but also kind of like what what makes what makes you tick what motivates um pretty big decisions like that It wasn't a major platform for you So it was it was the only social media platform I've ever engaged I mean like you said I have an Instagram I have a Facebook account but I never never used those as platforms right II I was never on them I never f I've never followed people and I've never and all the posting has just come from it's just marketing you know from my team Um But Twitter was me I mean I you know for better or worse and um I began to feel more and more for worse and it was um it was interesting because it was very you know I I've I've you know I've talked about it a lot of my podcast about just my my love hate relationship with Twitter Over the years many good things came to me from Twitter and I and I was you know I was following a lot of smart people and it it had become my news feed and my first point of contact with with information each day and I was really attached to it just for that reason just as a consumer of of content Um And then it was also a place where I was at I genuinely wanted to communicate

with people and react to things and and and you know you know I would see some article that I thought was great and I would signal boost it you know to to my uh the people following me on Twitter And that was rewarding And I was I I could literally help people on Twitter Like I mean there was a there were you know there are people who I've raised lots of mo uh money for on Twitter just by you know signal boosting their gofundmes And and uh so I was engaged in a way that seemed productive Um But I was always worried that it was producing needless conflict for me and was was giving me a signal in my life that I was being lured into responding to and taken seriously that was out of proportion to its its representation of any opinion or set of opinions that I I should be taken seriously So I was noticing that that um again this evolved over years I mean this this long before long long uh long predating um recent changes to to Twitter Um But I was noticing that many of the worst things that had happened for me professionally were first born on Twitter I mean just like you know some some conflict I got into with somebody or something that I felt like I needed to podcast about in response to on Twitter Um it's just so much of it It's either it's Genesis was Twitter or it's the the uh the further spin of it that became truly unpleasant and dysfunctional happened on Twitter Like it was just Twitter was part of the story when it was got really bad And I've I've had you know vacations that have gone sideways just because I got on Twitter and said something and then I had to produce a controversy that I had to respond to and then I had to do a podcast about that and it just and it was just OK this is a mess right And so at that point you know I I you know I have friends who you know also had big Twitter platforms who would who would say you know why are you you know why are you responding to anything on Twitter Just Tweet and Ghost you know just due to have like Joe Rogan sat me down and tried to get you know give me a talking to as did Bill Maher Um and both of them engaged Twitter in that way I mean they I think they basically never look at their at mentions they never see what's coming back at them They just you know they use it effectively the way I use or don't even use Instagram or Facebook I mean I don't even see what's going out there in in my name Um And so I I could essentially do that for myself on Twitter presumably And I did that for some periods of time but then I would continually decide ok now it's all balanced again Maybe I can just communicate here because it was very tempting for me to communicate with people because I would see somebody you know clearly misunderstanding something I had said on my podcast And I think it's like why not clarify this misunderstanding right And then and my

efforts to do that almost invariably produced a um this I mean sometimes it was a kind of a meandering uh process of of discovery but often it was just kind of a stark confrontation with what appeared to me to be just lunacy and malevolence on a scale that I never encounter elsewhere in my life Like I never meet these people in life right Um And yet I was meeting these people by the tens of thousands on Twitter And so it was the thing that began to worry me about it And again I understand that people have the opposite experience I mean depending on what you're putting out and what you're you know the kinds of topics you're touching you could have just nothing but love coming back at you on Twitter right Uh But because I'm very uh essentially in the center politically and because I'm I you know I my this is now on my podcast This is not in the Waking Up app I'm often criticizing the Far Left and criticizing the Far right I'm basically pissing off everyone some of the time right So and it's very different if you're only criticizing the left you hate um no doubt you get hate from the left but you have all the people on the right who just reflexively and tribally are are expressing their solidarity for you right And who are who are dunking on your enemies for you And you know when when your enemies come out of the woodwork and if you're only criticizing the right I'm sure you get a lot of pain from the right But you've got the people on the left who are tribally identified with the left who are who are just going to reflexively defend you If you're in the center criticizing the left as hard as anyone on the right ever criticized the left criticizes the left and you're also criticizing the right as hard as anyone on the left criticizes the right You're getting hate from both sides all the time and no one is reflect reflexively and tribally defending you because you pissed them off last time Like you might be getting hate from the left now and the people on the right agree with you But they can't forget the thing you said about Trump on that podcast you know you know two podcasts ago Um So they're not gonna defend you And so what I I basically created hell for myself on Twitter because it was um I just you know it was just a theater of it was just pure cacophony most of the time And what I was seeing was I mean like there's no way there's this many psychopaths in the world but I was seeing psychopaths everywhere I was seeing like the most malicious dishonesty and uh you know just goalpost moving and hypocrisy and and I mean it was just I mean some of its trolling and some of it's real confusion and some of it is psychopathy but it's like it was so dark that um I worried that he was actually giving me a a very negative and sticky uh view of humanity That was I mean one it was you know I I think it is an inaccurate but two iii I it was it was

something I was returning to so much because again I was checking Twitter you know at least a dozen times a day And I'm sure there are some days where I checked it 100 times a day I mean it was it was again it was my main source of information I was constantly reading articles and and then putting my own stuff out um that it became this kind of fun house mirror in which I was looking at the the most grotesque side of of humanity and feeling e you know implicated in in in ways that were important important because it was just it was reputation important or seemed to be important Um I know a lot of these people it's not these weren't just faceless trolls These are these are people with whom I have had relationships and in some cases friendships who because of what you know largely Trump and COVID did to our political landscape in the last you know half a dozen years um were beginning to act in ways that that that seemed you know starkly dishonest and and you know crazy making to me So I was just noticing that I was forming a view of people who I actually have had dinner with That was way more negative based on their Twitter behavior than I think would ever be justified by any way they would behave in life with me You know I mean it's like it never I was never gonna have a face to face encounter with any of these people that was this malicious and dishonest and gas lighting and weird Right As as was what was happening hourly on Twitter Right And so I just began to become more sensitive to what this was you know just the residue of all of this in my life and how and just how often the worst thing that the worst thing about me in my relationship with the people in my life you know they just talking to my wife or my kids was just the fact that I had been on Twitter at some point in the you know previously in I mean in the previous hour and there was some residue of that you know if you know in my interaction with them you know I was like what you know what are you stressed out about What are you annoyed about What are you pissed off about You know what can't you get out of your head Um What is the thing that you now feel like you need to spend the next week of your life focused on because it went so sideways for you All of that was Twitter you know a little I mean literally 100% of that was Twitter And and so um I just at one point it was actually on Thanksgiving Day I just looked at this and I just just I mean there was very little thought went into it I mean literally I mean I you know there was more thought in involved in you you know you know whether I wanted coffee when you asked me when I showed up here I mean it was just like at a certain point I just I just saw it and I just I just ripped the band aid off And and yeah So um and to answer your other question it's been

almost wholly positive as you might expect Given the the litany of of uh pain and discomfort I just ran through But um I mean it's also it's it's it's surprising to recognize how much of a presence it was in my life Given the sense of what is now missing I mean it's like there there's it was there's no question there was a there's a kind of an addictive component to it And when you see I mean like when I look at what Elon is doing on Twitter forget about his ownership of it And I mean you know I'm not you know I have got a lot to say about you know the choices he's making uh for the platform but just his personal use of it is just so obviously an expression of I mean I don't know if addiction is the you know clinically appropriate um term but you know his dysfunctional attachment to tweet to using the platform forget it again forget forget about changing it and owning it but just the just the degree to which it is pointlessly disrupting the life of one of the most productive people in any generation Um uh I that was also instructive to me because I because I know Lan and III I just you know um he's from my you know kind of a friend's eye view of the situation it's so obviously not good for him that he's spending this much time on Twitter Um that uh II I just brought that back to me It's like well if it's not if if this is what it's doing to Elon and he's got all these other things he could be doing with his attention How much of my use of Twitter is actually you know a good idea and you know optimized to my well being and the well being of the people around me Um So anyway it was there was an addictive component to it I think And so when that got stripped off I you know I I do notice that there's I mean there's some there are times I pick up my phone and I realize that this is like the old me picking up my phone for a for a reason that no longer exists because there's not that much I you know I you know I have a slack channel with my team and I've got email obviously but it's like that is not much of what I was doing with my phone really in the end And so like it's just my phone is much less of a presence in my life And and so it's it's almost wholly good But um yeah it's you know there's I think there is some danger in uh or some some possible danger in losing touch with certain aspects of culture which again I'm not even sure I mean there's this question of you know how much is Twitter real life and how much is it just a mass delusion Uh I don't know but in so far as it actually matters what happens on Twitter um or in so far as I was actually getting a news diet which I'm not gonna be able to recapitulate for myself or I'm just not in fact want to recapitulate for myself even if I could Um if any of that matters I haven't discovered that yet But it's yeah I mean there's it was taking up an immense amount of bandwidth and

it's it's impressive I mean II I think I said I I you know it was like I amputated AAA Phantom limb right Like it was not a real limb but it was it was a this continuous presence in my life that um that uh it is it's weird It it actually relates to the concept of self in in surprising ways because I I felt there was a part of myself that existed on Twitter And I you know I I just performed a suicide of that that self rather like that's this is ending right now and you know there's no residue there's nothing to go back and check There's just it's gone I and I didn't even I didn't go back and look at my like what's interesting to consider is that you know I've been on Twitter for 12 years I don't keep a journal I mean Twitter in my timeline would have been a kind of journal I could have gone back to a specific hour and a specific day and looked at what I was paying attention to I mean that could have been an interesting record of just who I've been for a decade and I and and and probably a pretty humbling record of who I've been for a decade Um in terms of the kinds of things that captivated my attention But I didn't even you know I didn't even think to go in you know nostalgically just look at any of that or see if any of it was worth saving or archiving or think I just just delete you know and it was um uh and so my my actual sense of who I am and my engagement with with my audience my you know the the world of people who could potentially know me like what does it mean to be to have a platform you know where do I exist digitally My sense of of all of that got truncated in a in a way that um is much less noisy I mean it's amazing how much can't get fucked up now in my life Like it's like with Twitter almost anything could happen right Like like the next tweet was always an opportunity to massively complicate my life There is no analogous space for me now And you know this is what I'm gonna say on your podcast what I'm gonna say on my own podcast what I'm gonna write next that's much more um you know uh deliberative and uh the opportunities to take my foot out of my mouth or to reconsider all you know whether any of this is worth it is it worth is this the hill I really wanna die on now Um It's it's much more um can be much more considered and I mean I think all of that's to the good Um but even more important than that is that there's not I'm not getting this continuous signal that is always inviting a response whether on Twitter or on my own podcast or you know anywhere else Um and it's just much less noisy I mean life is much less noisy and and cluttered and that's you know that that is definitely feels better It just it's 100% better