

The True Purpose of Meditation | Dr. Sam Harris & Dr. Andrew Huberman

So the illusory of the self doesn't cut against any of those obvious facts So the the the the the sense of self that is illusory Um And again we might want to talk about self in other modes because the there's there's just a lot of interest there psychologically and you know ultimately um scientifically um the the thing that doesn't exist uh it certainly doesn't exist as it seems And I would I would want to argue that it actually is just a proper illusion Uh Is this the sense that there is a subject interior to experience in addition to experience So most people feel like they're having an experience of the world and they're having an experience of their bodies in the world And in addition to that they feel that they are a subject internal to the body you know very likely in the head Most people feel like they're behind their face as a kind of locus of awareness and thought and intention and and and that is it's almost like they you're a passenger inside your body You don't most people don't feel identical to their bodies and they can imagine this this is so the origin the psychological origin and you know the the folk psychological origin of of a sense of that there's there might be a soul that could survive the death of the body I mean most people are are what my friend Paul Bloom calls common sense dualist right You you you're just the default expectation seems to be that whatever the relationship between the mind and the body there's this there's some promise of separability there right That the and whenever you really push hard on the science side and say well none of the mind is really just what the brain is doing that begins to feel more and more counterintuitive to people And there still seems some some residual mystery that you know at death maybe something is gonna lift off the brain and go elsewhere right So there's a sense of dualism uh that ma many people have and obviously that that's supported by many religious beliefs Um But this feeling it it is a very peculiar starting point with the people feel that in a in a they don't feel identical to their experience right As a matter of experience they feel like they're on the edge of experience uh somehow appropriating it from the side you're kind of on the edge of the world and the world is out there Your body is uh is in some sense an object in the world uh which you you know you it's different from the world you know the the boundary of your skin is still meaningful You can sort of loosely control your body I mean you can't control you can control your gross you know and and subtle

you know voluntary motor movements but uh you can't you're not controlling everything your body is doing You're not controlling your heartbeat and your you know your um hormonal secretions and all of that And so there's a lot that's going on that is in the dark for you And then you you give someone an instruction to meditate say and you say OK let's let's examine all of this from the first person's side Let's look for this thing you're calling I and again I is not identical to the body People feel like their hands are out there and they're when if they're gonna meditate they're gonna close their eyes very likely And now they're gonna pay attention to something they're gonna pay attention to the breath or the sounds And it's from the point of view of being a locus of attention that is now aiming attention strategically at an object like the breath um that there's this dualism that is set up and ultimately the ultimate promise of meditation I mean there are really two levels at which you could be interested in in meditation Um One is you know very straightforward and remedial and non paradoxical and very well subscribed And it's it's the usual set of claims about all the benefits you're gonna get for meditation right So you're gonna lower your stress and you're gonna increase your focus and you're gonna you know stave off cortical thinning and there's all kinds of good things that science is saying meditation will will give you Um And none of that entails really drilling down on this paradoxical claim that the self is an illusion or or or anything else of that sort But from my point of view the real purpose of meditation and its real promise is not in this long list of of benefits And uh you know I'm not discounting any of those though you know the science uh for many of them is quite provisional Um It's in this deeper claim that if you look for this thing you're calling I if you look for the sense that there's a thinker in addition to the the the mirror rising of the next thought say you won't find that thing and and you can what's more you can find it in a way that's conclusive Uh and that matters right And and it has a uh there's a host of benefits that follow from that discovery um which are uh quite a bit deeper and more interesting than engaging meditation on the side of its benefits you know distressing increasing focus and all the rest