

3BOOKS - Johann Hari

[00:00:00] **Neil Pasricha:** Here,

[00:00:00] **Johann Hari:** also hide. I always feel that woman's voice is very sarcastic. Recording in progress. Hope it's fucking worth it.

[00:00:08] **Neil Pasricha:** Well, it's funny that you said woman, you, you, you, you caught that. I thought it, I I've always thought of it as like a, like a androgynous robot, you

[00:00:16] **Johann Hari:** disembodied, non-binary.

[00:00:18] **Neil Pasricha:** a disembodied, non-binary, uh, human sounding voice. You know, we just hit record. It says you're now recording a session, but you know, for a while with GPS devices, you could choose, remember, you could have like William Shatner, you know, you could

[00:00:31] **Johann Hari:** I had to be very careful at this cuz I had to be careful at this cuz my dad is uh, very misogynistic and originally his GPS had a woman's voice and so would say at the next turning, go left and he'd go, no, you're fucking bitch you got left. I got right. And we're just refuse. And then when we changed it to a man, he was completely fine.

[00:00:51] Go, go left, I you got left here. Very good idea.

[00:00:53] **Neil Pasricha:** What do you, what do you attribute the, um, I, I, I recently interviewed a, a gentleman for, for the, for the s named Timothy Goodman and a mural artist in New York who, who recalls himself a recovering misogynist. What do you attribute your dad's misogyny to? Like, do you

[00:01:08] **Johann Hari:** Oh God, there's a whole podcast to be done. In the bizarre psychology of my father, I have benefited from my father's misogyny because I'm gay. And when I told him I was gay when I was a teenager, fortunately, uh, he is quite homophobic, but fortunately he hates women more than he hates gays. So he said, ah, son, just to me.

[00:01:26] You don't have to deal with these bitches. I was like, thanks dad. That's really touching . So I, I let's my dad, believe me, there's a whole one day, I'll write a whole book about that one. But the, uh,

[00:01:38] **Neil Pasricha:** well, I, I, I appreciate your openness to sort of talking about that and I. You know, it's funny, I, I read Chasing the Scream in its entirety, right? So, so way back in chapter 45 of this show, chapter 45, I wrote it down here so I can get, I could get it right, chapter 49. Dr. Andrea Cerda is a woman I met in downtown Toronto at this top 40, under 40 kind of ball.

[00:02:00] And, you know, everybody's like an accountant or a, a doctor or a, a consultant. And I said, what do you do? And she said, I give drugs to drug dealers, or I give drugs to drug. I, I give drugs to drug users rather not drug dealers. And I was

[00:02:12] **Johann Hari:** she's not Pablo Escobar.

[00:02:13] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah, exactly. And she's like, you know what? The forefront of the safe supply movement in Canada.

[00:02:17] And so, and so, one of her three most formative books was Chasing the Scream. And I made that my top pick of 2019. I'd read it cover to cover. And so when you came out with Soul and Focus, I was like, okay, what's he gonna do now? And I read this thing cover to cover. I put it in my, my book club this past January, so I guess a year I guess when it came out, you know, in hard cover.

[00:02:38] And I've just been like, mesmerized by your work, by your research, by the, the, this tring around the globe that I'm so kind of, uh, amazed at. You're going all over the place. And what's amazing to me, Johanna, is that you also like me talk a lot about reading. Since this show is all about reading and books.

[00:02:57] I thought I could start today by just giving back to you. Some of the quotes you've said or written about reading their books and just get your, get your current take on them. What do you, what, you know, expand, uh, uh, elucidate for us as you see fip? Like for example, this tweet you sent out on May 8th, 2019, where you said, one of my favorite books is called The Lost Art of Reading. It talks about how reading books is a crucial act of resistance to the madness of our time.

[00:03:29] **Johann Hari:** Yeah, you should, you have you, do you know Dave who wrote that book? Dave Allen. Oh, remind me, I'll introduce you to him. He's a great guy. He was the LA Times book critic for maybe 30 years. And, uh, we've become friends. He's, uh, cause I'm writing a book partly about Vegas, where he spent a fair bit of time.

[00:03:43] Um, well, I mean, my relationship to books, I want to, I can give you an intellectual argument here, but my relationship books comes from a much more primal thing than this, which is, um, you know, I grew up in a really violent and insane, uh, environment and my way of just not being present with that was just to read all the time.

[00:04:07] Right? Like, I would watch television or read. That was the two things I did as a child, uh, when I was in my home. Um, and reading for me was always, A profoundly centering and clarifying space. Um, so that might seem like a kind of bad reason to love reading or be drawn into it, but it led me to these great kind of pleasures.

[00:04:35] I think. And I should just apologize to your listeners by the way. I've got, um, a quite a bad flu at the moment. So if you did a blood test at the moment on me, I would be 90% paracetamol and 10% caffeine. But, uh, so I'm normally more coherent than this, but, well, obviously I think reading books is one of the most precious forms of attention that, that human beings can provide.

[00:04:56] We can talk about why, and Momo's recent book is about how that is being stolen from us. It's called Stolen Focus. We are living in an enormous crisis of attention. The average American office worker now focuses on only one task for only three minutes for every one child. Who was identified with serious attention problems when I was seven years old, there's now a hundred children who've been identified with this problem.

[00:05:20] It's manifesting in all sorts of ways, politically, personally, in us, in our children, but one of the most obvious is just the enormous decline in reading. You know, this is the first time, uh, in the history of the American Republic that in any given year a majority of Americans don't read a single

[00:05:36] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah. 57% I think you said for Amer American time use survey.

[00:05:40] **Johann Hari:** Yeah. I mean, it's slightly ticked up under the, in the pandemic. So it would actually be a little bit better than 57% now, but it's still, you know, catastrophic decline. Uh, and has catastrophically declined across the board, although there's still a lot of hope, uh, and there's a lot we can do to put that.

[00:05:56] Right. So, yeah, for me, you know, particularly reading fiction, when you are reading a novel. Deeply simulating the consciousness of another human being. Right? In a way, it's far more effective than what we call virtual reality. I

think about, you know, the, the novels that I read, you can simulate being just completely different kinds of people, or even robots or octopuses or, you know, like it's a, I'm just reading a novel about octopuses that gain

[00:06:26] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah, y y you're another gender, another religion, another time of the world. Another place in the world. A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives, only one, right? George, r r Martin.

[00:06:37] **Johann Hari:** exactly. And I love that line. Who was Har Harold Bloom, the great literary critic was asked why he read so much and he said, because we can never live enough lives, which I think is really beautiful. And there's a guy in where you are in Toronto, uh, if you haven't met him, I shouldn't have teased him as well, called Professor Raymond Maher at the University of York, who's doing incredible, uh, research.

[00:06:58] He's proven. in all sorts of compelling ways that reading fiction really does deepen your empathy. I think he's done really important cutting edge research on this. Obviously I interviewed him for the book, um, and in Toronto I interviewed him. Um, so yeah, for

[00:07:14] **Neil Pasricha:** when you say, when you say actor resistance,

[00:07:17] **Johann Hari:** But we live in a culture where there's an enormous machinery that is designed to fragment your attention.

[00:07:25] That is making you dumber, less attentive, less empathetic, is designed to make you angry. That might sound curious or even conspiratorial. I spent a lot of time in Silicon Valley interviewing the people who designed key aspects of this machinery. Um, I frankly didn't believe it until I was taught through it by them.

[00:07:44] Um, so we are living in an environment that is profoundly debasing degradating. Our attention, professor Joel Nigg, one of the leading experts on children's attention problems in the world, who I interviewed in Portland and Oregon, said that we need to ask if we are living in what he called an attentional pathogenic environment. I went on this really big journey all over the world to try to understand why this is happening to us, why this collapse of attention is happening. And I interview people, you know, from Moscow to Montreal to Melbourne to, you know, um, Not, not just cities beginning with a letter m I dunno why my mind became so alliterative there.

[00:08:29] And, uh, I interviewed over 200 of the leading experts on attention of focus. I used my training in the social sciences at Cambridge University to really deeply into their work. And I learned there's scientific evidence for 12 factors that can make your attention better or can make your attention worse.

[00:08:46] And loads of the factors that can make your attention worse have been hugely rising in recent years. Some of those factors are in our technology. Some of them go way beyond our technology to areas I had never really thought about in relation to this. But in combination, they're profoundly harming our ability to, for example, read books, do other things that require deep focus and attention.

[00:09:06] And the important thing to understand about that is your attention didn't collapse. Your attention has been stolen from you by some really big forces. But once you understand those forces, you can begin. We can begin together to get our minds

[00:09:20] **Neil Pasricha:** Well, you were, you were speaking kind of music to our ears. The, this is a big underlying theme of this show. Part of the reason I started three books was because I could feel my attention fracturing, because I could tell that I stopped reading. I started this podcast as a way to get back into kind of long form reading books.

[00:09:36] That's what the whole premise of the show is. So, you know, this is no wonder I kind of suck up your, your writing like a Hoover, you know, I'm, I'm very, very much aligned with you, but the thing I get to the place, I get to, you even have a quote in *Stolen Focus*. You say, what happens to deep thought when it goes the way of opera or volleyball? And I thought that was so interesting, just those two examples of like a high art with a small subculture following them, you know? Or like a, you know what, what does happen? You, you've sort of painted this portrait of like, you know, there's gonna be a large kind of underclass of people who can't get into, is there a deep thought anymore that the TikTok ation of everything but are, so is everything you said in this book, which I've now, you know, it came out a year ago, you wrote it probably two years ago, if not more.

[00:10:22] Is everything, are any trend lines changing? Is there hope? And if not, like what do we talking about the active resistance. Like, so what do we do? We got podcasts, we have long form conversations here, but I'm telling you, I saw you tweet last night. You know, is it weird that I only like Daniel Radcliffe when he is, when he is dressed up like a weird al you know, I mean, you're on Twitter the same and I wouldn't have seen it if I wasn't on Twitter.

[00:10:47] So I'm obviously

[00:10:48] **Johann Hari:** So

[00:10:49] **Neil Pasricha:** as you are.

[00:10:50] **Johann Hari:** I actually never log into Twitter. I, it sounds very grand, but I have an assistant I send my tweets I had to do, but the, uh, precise, but the, but I appreciate that's not an option available

[00:10:59] **Neil Pasricha:** I love that when you said that to your assistant, the the weird WL thing,

[00:11:03] **Johann Hari:** no, I mean, it is weird how hot Diana Radcliffe is as we all just to be clear. But a point needs to be discussed by the world.

[00:11:09] But no, I think there's so many things in what you just said and, um, look, the truth is we're in a race. On the one side, you have all the forces that I write about, install and fo focus, the 12 factors that are undermining our attention and focus, and they range from some aspects of our technology to the food we eat, the way our workplaces currently function to the way our kids' schools function.

[00:11:33] A whole array of factors and many forces are poised to become more powerful. Paul Graham, one of the biggest investors in Silicon Valley, said The world will be more addictive in the next 40 years on the trajectory than it was on the last 40. Think about how much more addictive TikTok is than, uh, sorry.

[00:11:51] Think about how more addictive TikTok is than Facebook, right? Okay. Now imagine the next crack like iteration of of TikTok in the Metaverse. That's one side of the race, right? On the other side of the race. There's got to be a movement of all of us identifying these factors that are harming our attention and science around them, and responding, I think in two ways for all of the 12 factors that I wrote about.

[00:12:15] Install of vog. I've gotta respond in this dual way. Firstly, we've gotta defend ourselves and our children as individuals, as much as we probably can. Um, and there are dozens of things that we can do as isolated individuals to do that. I go through loads and look, I'll give you an example of one, um, hang.

[00:12:34] Oh, I've got it. Here. Go. I got, hold it up as a prop. I feel like a QVC host at this point. Um, I also don't have any shares in this company I should

point out cuz I, they should still be paying the commission. Um, so this is a case. Safe is a plastic safe, uh, with a lid. You, you take off the lid, you put in your phone, you put on the lid, you turn the double.

[00:12:55] and it locks your phone away between anything between five minutes and a whole day. Right? I give myself at least four hours day where the case safe is locked away and uh, the phone is locked away and the case safe and I cannot access it, right? I won. Sit down and watch a film with my partner and listen both our phone, in the phone gel.

[00:13:13] I have friends around for dinner and unless everyone in prints their phone, and I explained to Paul one of the things I learned on the journey for the book, and I would say to them, think about anything you've ever achieved in your life that you are proud of. Whether starting a business, being a good parent, learning to play the guitar, whatever it is, that thing that you are proud of required a huge amount of sustained focus and attention.

[00:13:37] And when your ability to focus and pay attention breaks down, your ability to achieve your goals breaks down. Your ability to solve your problems breaks down. . That's one side. We've got to defend ourselves and our children, right? And I go through many ways we can do this, but I also wanna be really honest with people because I don't think other books about attention are leveling with people.

[00:14:00] I'm passionately in favor of these individual changes. They will make a big difference to your life on their own. They're not gonna solve the problem. Cuz at the moment it's like someone is pouring itching powder over us all day and then they're leaning forward and going, Hey buddy, you should learn to meditate.

[00:14:16] And then you scratch so much and you're gonna go screw you. I'll learn to meditate. That's really valuable, but you need to stop pouring this damn itching powder on me. We've got to actually deal with the factors that are doing this to us. And a lot of has to happen at a social and collective level.

[00:14:31] Right? Um, and a lot of these factors that are profoundly harming our attention are relatively recent and can be dealt with as Dr. James Williams, one of the leading. Philosophers of attention in the world today, I would argue the leading philosopher said to me, you know, this existed for 1.4 million years before anyone said, gosh, should we put a handle on this thing?

[00:14:55] The entire internet has existed for less than 10,000 days. There are some specific aspects of our technologies that are harming our attention. Indeed are designed to harm our attention for reasons I can explain, but they don't have to work. We can have the technology we currently have and have it not be designed to hack and invade and damage our attention.

[00:15:14] Indeed, it can be designed to help a, our attention if we want it to. That's perfectly achievable. 10,000 days is not long in human history and many of the other factors from the food industry to the way our schools work. We can put these things right. I'm actually very optimistic. These problems can be solved, right?

[00:15:30] They're not. This is not some immutable part of modern life. These are very specific factors that are causing these problems. We've dealt with bigger problems than this in the past, but we've got to decide. We value attention. We've gotta decide it's something we want for ourselves and our children, and then we've gotta fight for it.

[00:15:47] Cuz you don't get what? You don't fight for those fears. The 12 forces that I write about stolen focus, they're not gonna go away with their own accord, right? In fact, they're gonna get stronger and stronger to let them, but we can challenge them. They're not that powerful, right? We can challenge them if we want to.

[00:16:02] We are powerful much more than they are.

[00:16:04] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah, I love this. It's music to my ears. I've also picked up a couple things. You've, you've showed me the k, you've showed me the, uh, the K safe. So for those that can't see, it's like a large piece of plastic that you can put your phone in and you can set a timer. There's another one online that I always talk about called phone sell fee, uh, phone and then C e l l.

[00:16:23] Um, similar thing, it costs a hundred dollars that's made a glass. And I always joke, you have to, you know, smack it with a hammer if you need to open it. I also heard you say, you know, it was quick, but you know, you said, I don't have access to my own social media. I have to go through somebody, which I think is really smart.

[00:16:35] So for the podcast, uh, stats for this show, same thing. I don't have a password to Lipson cause I know I would just get obsessed with it, right? So I, I I, I sort of ask somebody, Navr to give me the password. Is there anything else

you're doing as an, an individual today? that you are using to guard and grow your attention.

[00:16:55] I'm, I'm asking, as you know, you've emerged as this real kind of global expert on attention. So what oth other than those two, do you have anything else you're doing in your day to day?

[00:17:05] **Johann Hari:** I mean, yeah, I'll go through dozens in the book, but I'll name another, which is one of the 12 relates to one of the 12 causes. We sleep 20% less than people did a century ago. British children sleep 85 minutes less than they did in 1945, and I interviewed many of the leading SLE experts in the world, but one in particular really haunts me, Dr.

[00:17:24] Charles Seis, who's at Harvard Medicals, arguably the most important sleep expert in the world. He said to me, even if nothing else had changed except that we sleep so much less, that alone would be causing an enormous attention crisis because, and there's many reasons why, but I'll just talk about one briefly, which is that, so when you sleep, the whole time you're awake, your body is generating something called metabolic waste.

[00:17:49] One scientist called it brain cell pooped to me, which helped me to understand whole time you're awake, your brain is getting clogged up with this metabolic waste. Then when you go to sleep, um, your cerebral spinal fluid channels open and a watery fluid washes through your brain and carries that, that that brain cell poop down into your, uh, kidneys and eventually out of your body.

[00:18:09] If you don't get eight hours sleep a night, you literally, your brain is clogged up the next day. It's not cleaned right? That feeling when you are particularly tired, when you feel kind of clogged up and hungover, it's not a metaphor. Your brain is literally clogged up. Right? Uh, if you stay awake for

[00:18:25] **Neil Pasricha:** that almost every day.

[00:18:27] **Johann Hari:** exactly how many hours a night do you sleep

[00:18:29] **Neil Pasricha:** I, I, I, I don't sleep anywhere close to enough. I, I, I'm usually sleeping four to six hours a night.

[00:18:34] **Johann Hari:** Right, right.

[00:18:35] **Neil Pasricha:** with small children and staying up late on, on screens and all the usual problems.

[00:18:39] **Johann Hari:** Well, a few things really helped me with this. So one is I u I put my phone in the Ks safe two hours before I'm gonna go to sleep. So I, and I set it for like five hours away so that I know, like, there's just nothing I can do. Right. Once the phone's there, it's there that I can't, you know, I mean, I could smash it if someone

[00:18:55] **Neil Pasricha:** Well, you got a laptop though, still?

[00:18:57] **Johann Hari:** Yeah. I put, I put freedom on that. So there's an app called Freedom. I mean, usually I leave my laptop in my office cause I've got an office that's separate to my home and I, I usually leave my laptop there overnight anyway. But if it's in my home, I, there's an app called Freedom that can cut you off on the internet.

[00:19:12] You can t it to cut you off either from specific websites. Say if you were addicted to Instagram, you can say, cut me off for the next five hours. Or you can tense, cut you off on the entire internet. So I would, if I had my laptop in my, uh, home, I would cut it off. So really prioritizing sleep has massively helped me.

[00:19:33] Now obviously we need to also deal with the structural reasons why people aren't sleeping, but in your case, I would mentioning looking at things just before you go to sleep, there's something Dr. Seila discovered that's really worth thinking about in relation to that. It he, he's the person who, uh, developed what's called the second surge hypothesis.

[00:19:50] So if you imagine you go on a camping trip

[00:19:53] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah,

[00:19:54] **Johann Hari:** and the day goes on and you haven't put up your tent and it starts to get dark. When it starts to get dark, your body will get a natural surge of adrenaline and energy, and that's incredibly helpful. It will mean that you can put up your tent before it's completely dark and you'd be screwy stumbling around with a flashlight.

[00:20:12] Now that evolved Exactly. That evolved in human nature for very good reason. Right? Think about the circumstances where we evolved on the Savannahs of Africa. If you were separated, . You know, if you were away from

the tri, the, the tribe, if you were away from your group, if you had not yet set up a camp, it starts to get dark.

[00:20:29] Your body evolved to get a surge of energy so that you can make yourself safe before it's completely dark, right? This is very good reason for this in our evolution. But when artificial light comes along, and particularly the fact that we stare into artificial light now before we go immediately to sleep, this, this screws with with that reaction.

[00:20:47] So you're lying in bed, you're looking at your. , you close the laptop, you shut your eyes and go to sleep. Right? What your body's, the signal your body's just received is shit. It just got dark. I need to give him a surge of energy to get back to his cave. Right? He doesn't know you're already in your cave.

[00:21:05] Already in your bed. So looking at bright light immediately before going to sleep actually stimulates a surge of energy, which then means you, you were tired, that's why you closed the laptop. But now you've got this sudden surge of energy. You lie there and you think, shit, why can't I sleep?

[00:21:20] **Neil Pasricha:** Exactly.

[00:21:21] **Johann Hari:** So it's really important to know that about yourself cuz it gives you so, it means a great thing to do.

[00:21:26] Before we're back to go to sleep is read with a slightly dimmed light behind you. That's a great thing to do before you go to sleep because you are easing yourself rather than exposing yourself to bright light and then being plunged into darkness, you are easing yourself into darkness, which doesn't trigger the same surge of energy.

[00:21:43] Uh, so with, but with all the things I learned for these 12 factors, and they include loads of things I had just never thought about affecting our attention. Um, with, with, with, with all of them. There's this kind of doubleness, there's almost always something you can do as an individual. Sometimes it's quite large, sometimes it's quite limited, but it also has to be tackled at this, this bigger level, right?

[00:22:07] So think

[00:22:08] **Neil Pasricha:** But when you say bigger level you, like, can you give people some organizations that you personally like are, are supporting or following or subscribing to? I know there's the Center for Humane Technology,

which you've profile Tristan and, and, and, uh, Avie and, and the book, which is wonderful. Where else are you dedicating resources toward, towards these large Cause I, I see that, but when I think about the, the sort of mutiny of the people that are offline, I don't think we're together anywhere because we're, we're bird watching in the park.

[00:22:36] You know,

[00:22:36] **Johann Hari:** Well, let me, let me give you a sp specific example of a place that I went to that made a reform. There's many reforms we need. I talk about lots of individual changes that we can implement, and I talk about lots of social changes, which have been proven to be effective on this. But I'll give you an example of one because I think it, it helps you to see how the bigger changes actually make it possible to make individual changes.

[00:22:59] In France in 2018, they were having a huge crisis of what they called LA burnout, which I don't think I need to translate. the, and the French

[00:23:07] **Neil Pasricha:** do you know the Japanese word korosi by the.

[00:23:10] **Johann Hari:** Yeah. Death by overwork.

[00:23:12] **Neil Pasricha:** Okay, great. Yeah, I always say in English, we only have burnout. That's our top word. But in, in Japan, we've got, we've got Karoshi,

[00:23:18] **Johann Hari:** Exactly. Exactly,

[00:23:20] **Neil Pasricha:** we're on Labo. I love that.

[00:23:22] **Johann Hari:** exactly. So the, the, the, the French government under pressure from labor unions, uh, and they would never have done it without pressure from labor unions.

[00:23:29] They're very organized. Workers in France set up a government inquiry to figure out what the hell's going on. Why is everyone so burned out? And they discovered one of the key reasons is that 40% of French workers felt they could while they were awake, never stop checking their email or their phones cuz their boss could message them at any time of the day or night.

[00:23:49] And if you didn't answer, you'd be in trouble right now. I can give those people all the lovely advice in the world about, well put your phone in the

case of two hours before you go to bed. I can go down a big, long. , they can't do it. Right. They can't do it. If the condition of your employment is that you don't do that, is that you are constantly available, which is by the way, a very recent change.

[00:24:10] You know, I think we're probably the same age, Neil, when we were kids. Yeah. We're exactly the same age. The the, um, when we were kids, I mean, I don't remember, I don't think my parents were ever phoned by their employer after they came home. Like ever, like the only people who were on call when we were kids were the president, the prime minister, and, you know, doctors and even doctors weren't on call all the time.

[00:24:34] So we've gone from almost nobody being on call to almost half the economy being on call. And it's profoundly

[00:24:40] **Neil Pasricha:** So what's the law in France?

[00:24:43] **Johann Hari:** So what happened in France is, again, I wanna stress this, is because they have incredibly tightly organized labor unions they have who are, who fight for their rights. French government introduced a legal change, very simple.

[00:24:56] It's called the right to disconnect. It stipulates that every French worker has to have their work hours laid out, but in writing in their contract, and when your work hours are over, unless they're paying you overtime, you don't have to look at your phone or check your email. So when I was in Paris just before Covid hit, um, researching this and interviewing people about it, you know, renter kill got part, the, the pest control company got fined 70,000 euros for complaining that one of their workers had not checked his email an hour after he left work.

[00:25:27] Now you can see how much a big collective change that you can't get, you can't achieve on your own. And maybe if you're very powerful in your workplace, you can go to your boss and go, you know what? I'm never gonna check my email after hours anymore, but I, I doubt there's many people listening who could say that to their boss without consequences.

[00:25:43] So, but it's something we can definitely all achieve together, right? France a fictional place. It's not a science fiction entity exists, right? Um, and it's something that then it's a collective change. One of many I advocate that freezes up to make the individual changes that we want to make, right? So it's

not that the individual and collective, some people say, oh, are you in favor of individual or collective solutions?

[00:26:05] It's absurd. We obviously need

[00:26:07] **Neil Pasricha:** totally agree. I hear you. There's the separation, but I also think that we have to slather on top of that example, like the global late stage capitalism that we're in. And you know, although my mom couldn't bring home a computer when she was working for the government, she did sometimes stay late to kind of quote unquote like, get ahead.

[00:26:24] And we've just, you know, amplified that behavior to all of us so that if you are the kind of person that checks your email, then you do do a little bit more. And then the company does reward that behavior with, so the organizations who are motivated by profit, they, they, they won't go to France, they aren't gonna open up a new shop there.

[00:26:44] **Johann Hari:** It's really interesting if you, I understand what you're saying and I have sympathy for it, but actually even within the logic of late stage capitalism, which I want to stress, is not a logic I endorse. Not under did what I oppose, but even within that logic, actually exhausted workers do not produce the best.

[00:27:01] France has some of the highest productivity in the world, right? Cause their workers are not exhausted. You know, we're talking in the middle of the World Cup, right? There is no one watching who wishes that their team was gonna go onto the pitch? Having slept six hours last night cuz they were stressed out thinking the whole time.

[00:27:18] In fact, there's a whole science about making sure stocker players sleep before the match, right? No one thinks, by the way, they should take their cell phones on and be checking their cell phones during the match, either, all these sort of other things that we do. So think about what happened. So I went to New Zealand and spent a lot of time with a company called Perpetual Guardian, where they moved from a five day week to a four day week, but they were paid the same.

[00:27:40] So they effectively worked one day less, but they got the same pay as they had before. And incredibly, this was monitored by Auckland Business School. Their, their productivity went up not per hour. Overall, they achieved more in four days than they did in five. And this is something that keeps being found by four by experiments

[00:27:59] **Neil Pasricha:** yeah. Totally. We, I was, I worked 10 years at Walmart and we did, we changed our assistant managers from five days on, two days off to four days on, three days off, and changed their shifts from eight hours to 10 hours, which did, you know, the math worked out fine and it was the exact, it was the exact same benefit.

[00:28:15] And that's, that is arguably the most capitalist organization in the world at the time. You know, real, making this kind of realization.

[00:28:23] **Johann Hari:** Exactly. Exhausted workers are not good workers. Right? And this is one of these we have to really deeply challenge some of the conceptions about productivity that we have and including. By the way, once I've internalized, right? If I have a day when I go to bed and I've worked myself to the point of exhaustion and I've gone every hour I can, I feel a little bit of kind of Puritan.

[00:28:44] Good for you, Johan. You've worked yourself to the point of exhaustion. You worked hard today, even though I know actually

[00:28:50] **Neil Pasricha:** picture you being tired, honestly.

[00:28:53] **Johann Hari:** But, but that was not a day in which I was productive. Right? That was actually, I would've been much better off if I'd stopped at a certain point and then I would be able to think more clearly the next day.

[00:29:03] So you can see with so many of these 12 factors that I write about install and focus and that I saw on the ground in different parts of the world, people experimenting with alternatives. You kind of realize how much we get wrong about this, how much of what we've been told us. Give you another example of something I think will be playing out for literally everyone listening.

[00:29:25] I'd be amazed with there's a single exception. So I went to m I t to interview Professor Earl Miller, one of the leading neuroscientists in the world, and he said to me, look, there's one thing you've gotta understand about the human brain more than anything else. You can only consciously think about one or two things at a time.

[00:29:44] Yeah. This is a fundamental limitation of the human brain. The human brain has not changed significantly in

[00:29:49] **Neil Pasricha:** multitasking was the word. Multitasking was invented by ibm.

[00:29:53] **Johann Hari:** Exactly. It was invented to describe computers. Computers can do more than one thing at a time, right? We can't. So what Professor Miller explained is, um, we've fallen for kind of mass delusion. The average teenager now believes they can follow six or seven forms of media at the same time, and the rest of us are not that far behind them.

[00:30:11] So what happens is, scientists like Professor Miller and many scientists all over the world get people into labs, not just teenagers, older people too. And they get them to think they're doing more than one thing at a time. And what they discover is always the same. You don't do more than one thing at a time.

[00:30:27] What you do is you juggle very rapidly between tasks. You're like, what did Neil

[00:30:32] **Neil Pasricha:** Taking your socks off while brushing your teeth.

[00:30:36] **Johann Hari:** I mean, yeah.

[00:30:37] **Neil Pasricha:** around on one foot and you're drooling everywhere.

[00:30:40] **Johann Hari:** Exactly, exactly. You are constantly juggling between tasks. And it turns out that juggling comes with a really big cost. The technical term for it is the switch, cost effect. Um, if you try and do more than one thing at a time, you do all the things you are trying to do much less competently, you make more mistakes, you remember less of what you do and you're much less creative.

[00:31:01] And I remember when I first learned about this and I was studying the science of it, think, okay, I get it. But that's a small effect, right? It's a huge effect. Give you an example of a small study backed by a wider body of evidence. Hewlett Packard, the printer company, got a scientist to study their workers and he split them into two groups.

[00:31:20] And the first group was told, get on with your task, whatever it is. Um, and you're not gonna be interrupted, just do what you gotta do. And the second group was told, get on with your task, whatever it is. But at the same time, you're gonna have to answer a heavy load of email and phone calls. And they did this for a day, and then the scientist, Dr.

[00:31:39] Glen Wilson, tested the IQ of both groups. The group that had not been interrupted, scored on average 10 IQ points higher than the group that had

to give you a sense of how big an effect that is. If you or me sat down and smoked a fat spliff together, now Neil, and we got stoned, our IQs would go down in the short term by five points.

[00:32:00] Right? So being chronically interrupted in the way many of us are is twice as bad in the short term for your intelligence as getting stoned if you were a

[00:32:07] **Neil Pasricha:** This is how you tie your books together. This is beautiful

[00:32:11] **Johann Hari:** But this is, but this is why, right? I mean, you think about the implications of that. You'd be better off sitting at your desk smoking a fat split and doing one thing at a time.

[00:32:20] Then you would sitting at your desk not getting stoned and being constantly

[00:32:23] **Neil Pasricha:** a lot of artists and writers and, you know, a lot of people would agree. Would agree would,

[00:32:27] **Johann Hari:** I mean, to be fair, to be clear, you'd be better off neither getting stoned nor being

[00:32:31] **Neil Pasricha:** Right. Zero. Maybe there's some ways to add IQ points, but I hear what you're saying. The, the, you've given us a litany of examples and stories and specific proof points. Look, stolen focus is gonna be, I'm just about to write my top 10 books of, of the year. I put that out every year. It's gonna be one of my top 10.

[00:32:48] I can't compete with the top three overall on Amazon, which I, I, I saw the Times Square billboard. So, so, so that's, uh, I was gonna say, where's the other two? I was curious what the other two were, or,

[00:33:00] **Johann Hari:** every other accolade for me is worthless. After I was praised by Oprah, I'm like, it's like numbed to me. I'm just like, cuz also, like anyone being praised by Oprah would be like, thrilled. But like entire teenage years I was literally obsessed with Oprah. Right?

[00:33:13] Like obsessed. And now, um, it's like, I'm like, I'm like, I'm like a surfer who surfed the ultimate wave. It's like every other wave. I'm like, oh, what

[00:33:21] **Neil Pasricha:** funny, you mentioned Oprah, cuz I listened to your entire conversation, which I recommend on Super Sunday. And, and at the very what, what struck me at you was what you said at the very beginning, which is, hi Oprah, good to see you again. And I was like, what the, you know, this guy's

[00:33:35] **Johann Hari:** Every now and then,

[00:33:36] **Neil Pasricha:** the cover by like Elton John and, and you know, and I'm like, oh.

[00:33:40] I'm like, cur, how are you manifesting or managing these adult friendships with super, super celebrities? There's something going on and you got like a ultimate Rolodex going on in the background or something.

[00:33:51] **Johann Hari:** every now and then Oprah texts me and my friend or emails us. And every time it happens, I'm just like, shut up, everyone. Oprah needs me. Shut up. . Like, whatever is happening.

[00:34:01] **Neil Pasricha:** Oprah,

[00:34:03] **Johann Hari:** She's, she's, I have to say she's, she, she is, um, you know, I was reluctant to meet her in a way because she's, uh, someone like so much of my teenage years, ch childhood, teenage years were shaped by watching Oprah.

[00:34:18] That I was reluctant to meet her in a way. Cause I thought, God, this could be, this could go either way.

[00:34:22] **Neil Pasricha:** to your fingers.

[00:34:23] **Johann Hari:** Exactly. And she's, you. She is one of the two cleverest people I, I've ever met. Like she's, so I knew, I knew she'd be incredibly impressive. But she's, she's, she's, she's, um, she's extremely clever and observant and, um, sharp.

[00:34:45] You know, I mean, people, I think she's one of those people, people expect to be warm and cuddly and she's a perfectly warm and nice person. Of course, very warm,

[00:34:56] **Neil Pasricha:** You couldn't do

[00:34:56] **Johann Hari:** the thing that most strength

[00:34:57] **Neil Pasricha:** that.

[00:34:58] **Johann Hari:** Yeah. She's really fucking clever.

[00:35:01] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah, but how's your gift game? That's what I want to know in the text that you guys are having. Like, you know, cuz you could tell a lot by someone based on their gift game, you know,

[00:35:11] **Johann Hari:** Um, yeah, I'm not, I'm going no further in my disclosing

[00:35:15] **Neil Pasricha:** Okay. But you know what, this is, this is great context actually because what we have, what we have done in the big first kind of act of this conversation is really lay a heavy groundwork, which kind of amplifies what we're doing on this program, which is talking about why it's very important for now and for the next 15 years while we do this show to, to focus on books.

[00:35:36] And you've been so kind to distill down for us three of the most formative books of your life. I'm gonna describe each of them as if the reader or the listener is holding the book in their hands. And then I'm gonna ask you to tell us about your relationship. And we might have a follow up question or two about each one.

[00:35:52] We will begin with the one and only. She must have known the trial of Rosemary West by Brian Masters. This book was published in 1997 by double day. That covers black with an eerie photo of a woman looking at us with large glasses, whole images, sort of pixelated like a newspaper photo. The titles in an apple green all caps font with quote quotes around it.

[00:36:13] She must have known that has quotes around it. And the subtitle, the Trial of Rosemary West is in simple, kind of an impact font below. Brian Masters, born in 1939 in the uk, still alive today, known best for his biographies of serial killers. What is this book about? Attending the Rosemary West trial Masters came up with a penetrating study of the sexual obsession that led to the measured killing of 12 women and girls.

[00:36:38] He brings to light in horrific detail the murder, sadism and torture that occur. Masters from its privileged courtroom Vantage point looks closely at how, how and why ordinary humans were driven to serial killing of the most

devious kind. Filed this one under 360 4 0.152 for specifically murder. Dewey decimal heads.

[00:36:59] Johan, please tell us about your relationship with She must have known by Brian Masters.

[00:37:05] **Johann Hari:** So I should stipulate that I did not reread any of these three books

[00:37:09] **Neil Pasricha:** No, that's fine. That's

[00:37:10] **Johann Hari:** read it and I don't think it could have come out in 1997 cause I was younger than that and maybe it came out in North America in

[00:37:16] **Neil Pasricha:** Oh, maybe, yeah, I'm sorry. I might, I might have the

[00:37:18] **Johann Hari:** I would've been 18 then. I was definitely younger than that, but the, um, but so did you, did you know who Rosemary West was?

[00:37:26] Neil, before

[00:37:27] **Neil Pasricha:** I, I, I read her Wikipedia profile and she reminded me of Paul Bernardo, which is a really prominent and famous Canadian serial killer of the same ilk, unfortunately. So I, I know the Canadian version of her, uh, but not her. No, I hadn't heard of

[00:37:42] **Johann Hari:** right. So this was, um, this was probably the biggest news story in Britain when I was 15 years old. So it was, um, and this is gonna sound like a very odd book for me to chosen this one. Bear with me. Um, so. in 1994 in a town called Gloucester, a kind of quite, at that time, a quite poor town. Um, in, in England, um, there was a, a chaotic family with a father who was a builder named Fred West and a, a mother who was a sex worker called Rosemary West.

[00:38:17] Um, and their, their three youngest children were taken into protective custody, you know, care, the care system, child services, uh, because they were being, it looked like they were being neglected and physically abused in the care system. It was established that, in fact, these children had been really quite terribly abused, but they were really terrified to talk about it.

[00:38:39] And one of the children kept saying, well, I, I, I can't talk about this cuz I'll end up under the patio like my sister. And this social worker became

very concerned and went to the police. And the police refused to do anything. They were just a child that were ridiculous. And this social worker kept going back to the police.

[00:38:56] And there was a hugely credible police officer called Ha, um, Hazel Savage, who finally took it seriously, was the first police officer to take it seriously. And they went to this house and they found 12 bodies. They didn't find one body. They found 12 bodies in this house. And in the previous houses where this couple Fred and Rosemary West had lived, they were arrested.

[00:39:16] It emerged. They had murdered, uh, one of their children. And, uh, in fact, two children, um, Fred's child with his first wife, he'd also murdered his first wife. Um, and that they had, um, been prey on young girls who, who'd run away. They were, in fact, I always thought one of the most tragic things about this case is that the 12 known, there were certainly more than 12 victims.

[00:39:37] But of the 12 known victims, only one of them has ever reported missing. Um, so over a, a 21 year period, they had been murdering these people. Um, they then, of course, they're of course arrested. Um, and then not long afterwards, imprison Fred West killed himself. So Rosemary West Stan's trial alone saw these murders, and it's a very unusual case of a woman being accused of 12 sadistic sexual murders.

[00:40:08] It's almost unprecedented. Um, in fact, it is literally

[00:40:13] **Neil Pasricha:** Well, and yeah, and I was thinking in, in the, in the Canadian story, just to close that loop for people that might be thinking this, there's Carla Ulka, which was his, his wife that was involved the same way, but I I, but certainly extremely rare. You, you're right. You don't hear, when you think serial killer, you don't think a woman.

[00:40:32] **Johann Hari:** So Brian Masters is a really interesting British journalist. He's a rather, uh, posh, um, . He, he, he, he wrote books about Dukes and Duchess, and then he wrote the first book about Jeffrey Dharma, the first serious book about Jeffrey Dharma, the Shine of Jeffrey Dharma. Obviously, a lot of people are thinking about DMA at the moment cuz of the hugely successful Netflix series, which I've not

[00:40:56] **Neil Pasricha:** Netflix tells us what to.

[00:40:59] **Johann Hari:** exactly.

[00:40:59] But if you haven't, anyone who liked that series or indeed didn't like it, I really recommend the Shrine of Jeffrey Dharma extraordinary. But he, he also wrote about one of Britain's most notorious serial killers, um, who bizarrely, um, His home is just around the corner from where I live. But the, um, the Dennis Nielsen who, um, uh, he wrote an extraordinarily powerful, I think his best book killing the company was an extraordinarily powerful account of, of him.

[00:41:27] So Brian Masters is a very serious writer, a quite morally serious person. Um, and it goes to the trial of Rosemary West. And he writes this extraordinarily provocative book in which he argues that while Rosemary West was involved in the abuse of her children, she probably was not guilty of these murders.

[00:41:45] And she was sort of convicted because Fred West was gone. And we, we want, uh, we wanted someone to take out our rage on. So it's this incredibly bold, um, an extremely controversial book. It was one of a series. Incredibly controversial true crime books that were written in Britain in a roughly five year period.

[00:42:03] There was another one, uh, by the wonderful German writer of Gita Sorani, um, about, uh, called Cries unheard about. Uh, in the sixties, there had been a series of dreadful murders in Britain where 10 year old girl murdered, strangled to death, a load of, um, young children. It was a really bizarre and terrible case, and she was presented as this devil child.

[00:42:25] And Gita tracked down Mary Bell many years later in the late nineties, and it transpired that Mary Bell had been unimaginably, horrifically abused, and was reenacting the abuse that she had experienced. Um, uh, a really

[00:42:40] **Neil Pasricha:** So you're in, you're in like 19 94, 19 95 time period. You're 15. How this book comes to you some way.

[00:42:47] **Johann Hari:** So I, uh, I rem I remember where I bought it. I, I found it in a bookshop. I was a, I was a kid who'd always followed the news quite closely. Um, and I think because I had grown up in this very weird aran and violent environment, of course it was not like fr I don't wanna overstate, it wasn't like Fred and Rosemary West, obviously, but it was quite extreme I think, in my mind that I was sort of making sense of that by reading about more extreme environments.

[00:43:16] Um, I think, I mean, I don't think I would've thought that out then, but I think in re I don't think we would've been conscious. But in

[00:43:22] **Neil Pasricha:** your, your, your dad wasn't that bad.

[00:43:24] **Johann Hari:** no, it's not Fred West. No. To be fair to my dad, , it's not Fred West, but the

[00:43:30] **Neil Pasricha:** Well just cuz we started the conversation there.

[00:43:32] **Johann Hari:** exactly, yeah. Unfairly slander my father. Um, but the. So I think it was partly that, and one of the things that really struck me, although I don't ultimately agree with Brian Master's thesis, I do think Rosemary West knew, um, I think he makes a very compelling case, and it's a brilliantly written book, but also it's one of a, a series of books I read around that time that I think really appealed to me because it was the realization that in a book you could, in my mind, it's grouped with Christopher Hitchen's book, the Missionary Position, mother to Razor in Theory and Practice, which in a sense is the opposite book.

[00:44:05] What Brian Masters is doing is saying, look, there's this person you think is the devil, and actually here's this more complicated story about her. And certainly he's absolutely right that she was herself the product of unimaginably horrific abuse. You know, when she was a baby, she rocked so violently that the pram moved across the, the room.

[00:44:23] She was sexually abused almost from birth by a really insane father. And she was in fact, still being sexually abused by her father when she was married to Fred West. It was a dreadful kind of moral to novel kind of kind of story. But so you think about that story, he's taken this person who we regarded almost literally as the devil and saying, look, think about her differently.

[00:44:42] What, what Hitchens, who I later became friends with is doing with the Mother Theresa book, is here's this person you think is an angel, mother Theresa, and in fact was a really wicked person. Um, and you know, masters is a very morally serious person who I think is making, he's actually not trying to be provocative or shocking.

[00:45:01] I think Christopher, as he himself would've said, was, Pushing it a bit, I think, I mean, mother Trace certainly I think was a very morally, uh, flawed person. She would, to give two examples, a couple of examples, she would, um, when people were dying in, uh, her home in carat in agony, she

would say they shouldn't be given any painkillers other than paracetamol because suffering is beautiful and they're dying like Christ died on the cross.

[00:45:27] So really quite terrible things. Uh, she was, she said that divorce should be illegal, but when, uh, princess Diana, one of her rich friends got divorced, she said, I know their marriage wasn't working out. It's fine. Right? She'd literally campaigned for divorce to be illegal, but when rich people wanted to do it, she was fine with it.

[00:45:44] So, uh, it's got a bit, I wouldn't call her evil, but she was a, um, you know, a morally, certainly a much more morally complex person than the public imagination of her. And I think those two books really lit up my sense of like, whoa, you can. Take this thing that people really take for granted. Mother to raise her is a saint.

[00:46:07] Rosemary West is the devil. And if you do a book and you really go into detail, you can go, no, actually they really aren't it.

[00:46:16] **Neil Pasricha:** That's fascinating. That's so fascinating. Yeah. Cuz even, even you mentioning the Mother Theresa book now, which I've, I've seen you tweet about before. I've not read, I've read Hitch 22 and Mortality By Him. That's really it. And, uh, I think his, his Chris Vincent's work is wonderful. But even you just giving those examples now and you're hinting at what the book's gonna reveal in terms of, you know, it, it, it, it sort of fuzzes over the, the, the, the, you know, this is that old argument.

[00:46:44] Like we used to have three, we used to have three newspapers. We used to have three TV stations. We used to have a very clear sense of what was real. And now, you know, you're using these books as a lever into it. But now, with the infinite echo chambers, with the, with the endless deep fakes, with ais that look real.

[00:47:02] I mean, we're, we're also just, I love where it got you as a, as a kid, and don't you think we've also thrown gas on that now to the point where actually reality or how you, how you perceive anybody, is becoming so destabilized that it's almost unnerving or unsettling. Like, don't you feel like the destabilization of reality or what is true and what is real and what are people like?

[00:47:24] Look at what's happening with Elon Musk right now. You know, it's like, well, there's just too complex, uh uh, a series of informations that therefore

render any clear or solid opinion, even believable. And I find myself struggling with this. That's why I'm throwing that to you as a messy question.

[00:47:46] **Johann Hari:** I think there's some truth in what you're saying. I would separate out a few things. I don't think we wanna be forcibly nostalgic about the time when there were three TV channels. In fact, the next book we're gonna talk about manufacturing consent by name Chomsky shows why we, we should not be nostalgic about that.

[00:47:58] Although there was plenty of things that were better then than there are now and some things that are

[00:48:03] **Neil Pasricha:** I'm not

[00:48:03] **Johann Hari:** I

[00:48:03] **Neil Pasricha:** that the fake, I, I agree it wasn't the right reality, but it was, it was like we all agreed that JFK was assassinated. Now you can

[00:48:10] **Johann Hari:** Yeah. Look, the flaws of b BBC are infinitely better than the flaws of, you know, truth, uh, Alex Jones, right?

[00:48:18] **Neil Pasricha:** that's what I'm saying.

[00:48:19] **Johann Hari:** as Chomsky would, um, Chomsky would definitely say as well. But the, um, but I would bit, I think the thing you're getting at, there's lots of mechanisms that you're getting at there.

[00:48:30] And one is worth just taking a moment to unpack it, I think. So anyone listening, if you open Facebook, TikTok, Twitter now, they start to make money out of you immediately in two ways. As people who've been at the heart of designing them. Explain to me, The first way is really obvious. You see advertising, okay?

[00:48:47] Everyone knows how that works. You don't need me to tell you about that. The second way is much more important. Everything you do on these apps is scanned and sorted by their artificial intelligence algorithms to learn about you. So let's say that you've said on including your private messages on any of these apps that you like, I don't know, Donald Trump, Bette Midler, and you tell your mom and you just bought some diapers, okay?

[00:49:13] I was gonna say, you like Donald Trump. You're probably right wing. If you like Bette Midler and you're a man, you're probably gay. No disrespect to any straight men. You like Bette Midler, I don't believe you. Uh, and you and you. You are buying diapers. Okay? You've got a baby, right? All of these apps know if you've been using them for any reasonable amount of time, know tens of thousands of points of information like this about you.

[00:49:35] Many tens of thousands right now. They're learning that

[00:49:38] **Neil Pasricha:** Many more than you.

[00:49:40] **Johann Hari:** Yeah. And they're learning that information. For one key reason, they want to figure out how to keep you scrolling because every time you open the app and begin to scroll, they begin to make money. And every time you close the app, their revenue stream disappears.

[00:49:56] So everything, all of this ai, all of these algorithms, all of this genius in Silicon Valley is designed for one thing and one thing only to figure out how to get you to pick up the app as often as possible and scroll as often as possible. And I remember speaking to people at the heart of the machine and them telling me this again and again, and me just being, well, it can't be that simple.

[00:50:18] And there must be more to it than that. And then looking at me like I was this sort of like I was a maiden art in a Jin novel who just, just heard about the existence of fingering, right? But they were like, how? How do you think it works? Right? What do you think happens? You just like the head of KFC. , all he cares about in his professional capacity is how many times did you go to K FFC this week?

[00:50:38] And how big was the bucket you bought all these companies care about is how often did you open the app and how long did you scroll? Right? Um, now the reason this relates to what you're saying is so that algorithm, those algorithms, that AI machinery is set up just to neutrally monitor everyone, and they're monitoring almost literally everyone in the world now and figuring out, well, what kept, what kept them scrolling, and those algorithms stumbled into a underlying human truth about psychology.

[00:51:05] It's been known about for nearly a hundred years now. It's very simple. It's called negativity bias. Human beings will stare longer at things that make them angry or upset, then they will at things that make them feel good. If you've

[00:51:16] **Neil Pasricha:** That old amygdala.

[00:51:18] **Johann Hari:** well, if you've ever seen a car accident on the motorway, you know exactly what you're talking about.

[00:51:21] You stayed longer at the Mango car wreck than you did at the Pretty Flowers on the other side of the street. This is very deep in human nature. 10 week old babies will stare longer at an angry face than a happy face. It's probably for good reason in our evolution, our ancestors who were looking out for danger didn't get eaten.

[00:51:39] Perhaps a slightly crude way of putting it, but you see what I mean right now.

[00:51:43] **Neil Pasricha:** Daniel. Daniel, uh, Goldman calls it the amygdala Hijack.

[00:51:46] **Johann Hari:** Exactly. That's deep in human nature and and performs an important function for us. But when that combines with algorithms designed to maximize engagement and scrolling, it leads to a real problem.

[00:52:00] Because what these algorithms discovered is picture two teenage girls who go to the same party and leave to go home on the same bus, and one of them does a little video or a status update where they. That was a great party. Everyone looked good, had such fun, we danced to these songs. Wow. What night? And the other girl does a video where she says Karen was a fucking skank at that party, and her boyfriend's a prick and just does an angry denunciation of everyone at the party.

[00:52:28] Right. The algorithms are scanning for the kind of words you use. And

[00:52:32] **Neil Pasricha:** And, and they'll, and they'll pick up the, the one little mini frame of your face is all crunched up. You know, like, uh, all I see in the side of YouTube is angry. Jordan Peterson, angry Joe Rogan, shocked Mel Robbins shock,

[00:52:45] **Johann Hari:** Well, there's a reason for that,

[00:52:46] **Neil Pasricha:** only extreme emotions

[00:52:48] **Johann Hari:** but there's a reason for that. Right? Right. If it's enraging, it's engaging and it'll keep you scrolling. Right. So that first video, it will put into a few people's feeds, but that second video, it will put into far more people's feeds. Right. You know, I, I hope you're interested in what I'm saying, but if out of your window now you saw some people having a fist fight, you would stop listening to me and you would look at the fist fight.

[00:53:08] Right. Because you, you would just, your attention would be drawn. The problem is imagine that now, not just at the level of two teenage girls. Catastrophic though that is for teenage girls mental health. As we were all seeing, imagine a whole country plugged into a situation, a system, a mode of communication where the nicest people, the people who are in favor of being kind and reasonable and making compromises are pushed to the back and the most angry, vicious condemnatory people are pushed to the front.

[00:53:38] Except you don't have to picture that cuz we've been living it the last 10

[00:53:42] **Neil Pasricha:** Yeah. And in fact, it's making us more like that, which is the scariest part of it

[00:53:46] **Johann Hari:** It's reshaping us to be more likely.

[00:53:48] **Neil Pasricha:** us to be more extreme.

[00:53:50] **Johann Hari:** Exactly. And you know, Facebook's own internal research, um, in the wake of Brexit and the election of Trump, they set up the intel quote to figure out, you know, are we polarizing people?

[00:54:04] Which we now have, only because the heroic whistle.

[00:54:07] **Neil Pasricha:** or W Wall Street Journal thing.

[00:54:08] **Johann Hari:** yeah, exactly. They, the, the, that they, um, it was leaked to the Wall Street Journal by Francis Hogan. Um, it discovered one third of all the people who joined neo-Nazi groups in Germany joined because Facebook's own algorithm recommended it.

[00:54:25] You might want to join, it said, followed by an actual neo-Nazi group. Now, that's not because anyone at Facebook is a neo-Nazi, right? It's cuz they've set up a machinery that leads to making people angrier and more

polished. It's the opposite by the way, of the effect that we were talking about with novels.

[00:54:41] Novels make you more empathetic, these forms of interaction in the way they are currently set up. And that's an important caveat. Make you angrier, but this technology does not have to work that way. I can go to more detail, but we can regulate this technology. So instead of making us angry, divided, and unable to pay attention, it in fact makes us, in fact, makes us better able to pay attention and better able to think about other

[00:55:04] **Neil Pasricha:** So if you're Mark Zuckerberg right now, you've got a big company, it makes a lot of money and it's a, it's, it's very incentivized to keep making that money, as you said, more buckets of chicken. What could you actually do in practice that would. Preserve the health of your organization while being healthy.

[00:55:21] Like I, when Elon Musk tweeted, how do I make Twitter better? I replied to him, he did not, he did not like or comment my policy. He has no gift game for me. He said, I said to him, make it so that when I jump onto Twitter for the first time, I can choose the length of minutes a day I want to use this for, and have that remind me and pause me.

[00:55:39] And you know, like, let's recognize this thing is a. It's crack, so let's just make it a small dose and it reminds you, it jostle you off. I have to end, end up following doom scrolling bot, which I recommend everybody follow on Twitter Doom scrolling bot because it interrupts my own fee and says, hi, have yet go get a glass of water.

[00:55:57] Turn off Twitter. But, but if you're Zuckerberg and I'm, I'm painting it back to a, you know, a c e o because I don't, I don't think lawmakers are anywhere close to where technologists are right now in terms of they're not, I know, I know Tristan is going and testifying at, at congress and stuff, but they're, they're we're kind of eons behind.

[00:56:18] And aren't the lawmakers sort of , I know I'm going down a rabbit here, but aren't they sort of beholden to the, to the people that are telling them what to vote for anyway, like the, the, you know, all the um, the groups kind of in DC that are really incentivized? Like what was the stat like Google has like, you know, 10 x to the number of people it has in DC over the last , last few years.

[00:56:38] Like there's, they, the organizations, they. Put the research in place to influence the decisions in Congress that allow them to keep making money.

[00:56:49] **Johann Hari:** There's a historical analogy, which I think helps us to understand both what we need to do and why. Framing it as what? What do, what would you do if you were Mark Zuckerberg is not the right way of

[00:56:58] **Neil Pasricha:** Okay. Good. Thank you.

[00:56:59] **Johann Hari:** So you remember when we

[00:57:00] **Neil Pasricha:** I'm, I'm constantly in deference to your, your brain and I really appreciate it.

[00:57:04] **Johann Hari:** No, I understand you. I understand why you think of it that way, and I've asked that question myself, but there's a different way of thinking about it, I think. So, um, when we were kids, you'll remember, um, gasoline meant leaded gasoline. You'd go to the gas station and you bought leaded gasoline, and it was discovered by scientists.

[00:57:20] If that was discovered by female scientists in the 1920s, who warned us all, but we ignored her and mansplained her out the room. Um, the exposure to lead is really bad for people's brains and in particular, completely terrible for children's ability to focus and pay attention. And if it's in gasoline, it's in the air.

[00:57:38] Everyone was breathing it in. So the lead industry denied this for years. They've. Funded load of bullshit denialist science. But by the time you got to the late 1970s, the evidence was just undeniable. So a group of ordinary moms were, at the time were called housewives, banded together and said, why are we allowing this for-profit industry to fuck up our kids' brains?

[00:57:59] Right? This is crazy. And it's really important to notice what they didn't say. They didn't say, so let's ban gasoline and get rid of cars, just like no one. Rightly, rightly, nobody is saying, let's get rid of our tech. Right? What they said is, let's deal with the specific component in the gasoline that's harming our children's brains.

[00:58:17] Let's ban lead gasoline, so we have to move to other forms of gasoline. and it fired the classic pattern that Gandhi described of all political struggles. First, they ignore you, then they fight you. Sorry. First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you. Then you win. They won. As everyone listening knows, we don't have any more letter gasoline.

[00:58:37] As a result, the Center for Disease Control has calculated that the average American child is three to five IQ points higher than they would've been had we not banned lead. Right. Now we could go back to 1979 and say, well, if you were in charge of Lead Incorporated, what would you do? It's the wrong question.

[00:58:53] They're never

[00:58:54] **Neil Pasricha:** nomenclature on today and the tech. What is the, what are the, what's the lead Gasol gasoline in the.

[00:58:59] **Johann Hari:** exactly. So I spent a lot of time in Silicon Valley asking people that question, is there an equivalent to the lead in the leaded gasoline? And I'll give you an example. Asa Raskin who invented a key part of how most websites work, his

[00:59:11] **Neil Pasricha:** scrolling,

[00:59:12] **Johann Hari:** Yeah, his dad, Jeff Raskin, invented the Apple Macintosh for Steve Jobs.

[00:59:16] ASA said to me, there's an exact equivalent of the lead in the lead paint. You've got to ban the current business model. You've gotta say that a business model based on tracking and surveilling us in order to figure out the weaknesses in our attention and sell that attention to the highest bidder, is fundamentally inhuman and immoral.

[00:59:32] It's like lead in lead paint and we won't allow it. And I remember when Asia said that thing and lots of other people said it to me as well, saying to them, right, but let's imagine we do that. What happens the next day when I open Facebook? Would it just say, sorry guys, we've all gone fishing. that a cost?

[00:59:50] Now, what would happen if they'd have to move to a different business model? And everyone,

[00:59:55] **Neil Pasricha:** you pay for it. I think the answer is you pay

[00:59:58] **Johann Hari:** there's two. There's two, there's, that's one option. Every single person listening to your show, We'll have an experience of the two alternatives. There may be other alternatives that I haven't heard of yet.

[01:00:07] One is subscription. Everyone knows how hbo, Netflix work.

[01:00:11] **Neil Pasricha:** You pay for it.

[01:00:12] **Johann Hari:** you pay a certain

[01:00:13] **Neil Pasricha:** no ads on Netflix.

[01:00:15] **Johann Hari:** and then the key thing is all the incentives then change. Right at the moment. The incentives are how do we fragment Neil's attention so that we can sell it to the highest bidder? Instead, under subscription, the question becomes, oh, Neil's our customer.

[01:00:31] Now. He's not the product we sell to the, to our real customer, the advertiser. He's the product. What does Neil want? Oh, it turns out Neil feels good when he meets up with people offline. Okay, let's design our app to maximize him meeting up offline. There's all sorts of things they can do. That's one model, a different model, which would be my preferred one, I think, although it'd have to be done carefully, although I think subscription is much better than what we have now.

[01:00:53] Think about the sewer. Before we had sewers, we had shit in the streets, people got cholera. It was a nightmare. Right? So we all pay to build and maintain the sewers together. You own the sewers in Toronto? I own the sewers in London. Right. With all our other fellow citizens. It may be that like we wanna own the sewage pipes together cuz we don't wanna get cholera.

[01:01:14] We might wanna own the information pipes together cuz we're getting the equivalent of cholera for our attention

[01:01:19] **Neil Pasricha:** Wow. That's

[01:01:20] **Johann Hari:** You now you'd wanna make sure, of course it'd be essential that that was independent of the government. We absolutely do not want, we can imagine the nightmare of Donald Trump controlling the me this the

[01:01:32] **Neil Pasricha:** Or, or, or any one person. Or any one body. Right. It's, it has to be like the Green Bay Packers.

[01:01:38] **Johann Hari:** Musk, as we have at the moment, or the Chinese government when it comes to TikTok, are the Chinese communist tyranny. And

so yeah, I mean, what we have at the moment is a handful of extraordinarily, I mean, Mark Zuckerberg is so irresponsible that when he was given the evidence that a third of the people who joined neo-Nazi groups in Germany joined cuz his organization recommended it.

[01:01:58] And this is someone descended from Jewish people who had to flee that part of the world as the Wall Street Journal reported Zuckerberg shut down the group and asked him not be brought information like that again. So it's hard to imagine it could be in the hands of more irresponsible people right now.

[01:02:14] Although it's conceivable Donald Trump is worse than Martin Zuckerberg, anyone. So it's possible. But it's, it's, you'd have to, I mean there's basically Trump and the Chucky doll. Pennywise the clown, maybe. Uh, but you know, you'd have to go pretty far. So, yeah. But the key thing to understand is with all of these 12 factors, there are solutions and alternatives, right?

[01:02:33] We can deal with these things if we want to. Um, but we have to understand what's happening and then we have to deal with them. But also, just to address that other point you raised, which is something people say a lot, and I understand why they say it, it's, oh, but these politicians there, you know, they're just so, you know, you watch these clips of them and they don't even appear to understand what the internet is.

[01:02:50] What we say to that is Rebecca Solnit, the great writer, always says, politicians are weather veins. It's our job to be the weather. Those politicians will be as good as we make them. Right?

[01:03:00] **Neil Pasricha:** Are you in touch with your politician? Like start with that. Right.

[01:03:04] **Johann Hari:** yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's all sorts of ways we can pressure our politicians and create change, and it has to be through sustained movements. Um, but there's all, and look, I'm very conscious of this cause I'm gay, right? And I think about, you know, we were just talking about reading that book about Rosemary West and the year in which I read that, um, I would've been 16.

[01:03:24] I, I had never heard the concept of gay marriage, right? The front pages of British newspapers at that time. Were homophobia so extreme that now if a right wing conservative MP tweeted them, he would have to resign. Right. And I think about the scale of the transformation that's happened. That didn't happen because politicians woke up one day and decided to be nice.

[01:03:47] **Neil Pasricha:** we changed him. We changed

[01:03:49] **Johann Hari:** Ordinary people became better and then we made them change. Right. And

[01:03:55] **Neil Pasricha:** And conversations like this and the one you're having with Oprah and Joe Rogan and Rich Roll. I mean, it's, you're, you're really, we, this is such important work. Don't stop. I don't know what the Vegas book is about, but don't get too far off this train, man.

[01:04:11] We need, we need John on this. This is important. Your second most formative book. Okay. You're, you're 15 years old. It exposes you, it, it helps clarify kind of like your own living environment cuz you saw one that was kind of more disruptive and it sort of opened up the sort of complex morality of people that we, we vision to be kinda one way or the other.

[01:04:30] Then you're a bit older, you're gonna tell us when you read Manufacturing Consent, the Political Economy of the Mass Media by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. This book, see if I have it right, was published in 1988 by Pantheon Books. I have it right in front of me. It's a big thick, I got the paper back.

[01:04:48] Um, white book. It looks like it nipped off like the top right corner of the New York Times. You can almost see like the bottom of like the calligraphy on here in like a, a leftover kind of pen. Chomsky was born in 1928, still a alive today in his mid nineties, known for his media criticism and a slew of other things, especially through his professorship at MIT.

[01:05:08] In this Pathbreaking work, Herman and Chomsky show that contrary to the usual image of the news media as cantankerous, obstinate, and ubiquitous in their search for truth and defense of justice in actual practice, they defend the economic, social and political agendas of privileged people that dominate domestic society.

[01:05:26] The state and global order file this one, Dewey Decimal Heads Under 302.0234 for social interaction under social sciences and communication. Johann, tell us about your relationship with manufacturing consent by

[01:05:41] **Johann Hari:** So I came

[01:05:42] **Neil Pasricha:** Herman.

[01:05:43] **Johann Hari:** so I came to this in a really weird way. Um, I'm sure I had read Chomsky before this when I was a student, but I came to manufacturing consent, uh, because Chomsky attacked me, , uh, and I realized he was completely right. So when I was 23, bizarrely, I became a newspaper columnist in Britain. and which is a stupid age for anyone to be a newspaper column.

[01:06:05] It's still bit, it's a pretty stupid provision at the best of times. But I think when you're 23, it's particularly silly and, uh, to my shame, uh, and I don't mean that sarcastically, I really am ashamed of it. I was, um, I supported the Iraq War in 2003 when it began. I had been to Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and I kind of thought, well, anything would be better than that.

[01:06:26] And I was strongly in favor of the invasion and a British group called Media Lens, who I'm hugely grateful to or they don't agree with them on everything. Um, who are kind of left wing media monitoring group. Um, sent some things I'd written to to Nome and, um, and he wrote this absolutely withering deconstruction of what I said.

[01:06:51] And I was really upset as you, as you anyone would be if they sort of, uh, attacked that way. And then over the next year or

[01:06:56] **Neil Pasricha:** What was his? What was his, if you could, I know it's hard to distill his, his, what was his big punch

[01:07:03] **Johann Hari:** I think I, I don't, I mean, I haven't read it in many years, but I essentially what he, what he said is, uh, if I remember correctly, is that I was falling for a lot of American propoganda that, you know, of course it's not wrong to oppose Ssam Hussein. He, he strongly opposes opposed Ssam Hussein. But the, I was criminally naive about the nature of the American invasion, what was driving it and what it would be like in practice.

[01:07:26] And I noticed in the next few years, everything Chomsky said turned out to be right. And everything I said turned out to be wrong. And so I read manufacturing consent. I'll come back to that in a second. And then a couple years after that, I covered the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is the remains to this day, the deadliest war since the second World War.

[01:07:47] And I used a lot of, I had what I had learned from manufacturing consent and from Tomsy. in that reporting, it really infused and informed it. Uh, cause it was a war driven almost entirely for Coltan. Um, which is something that's in play stations, cell phones. It was a war essentially for

[01:08:06] **Neil Pasricha:** What year is this? This,

[01:08:07] **Johann Hari:** the, the war in the DRC was 2007 and

[01:08:11] **Neil Pasricha:** I didn't know this, what you said. Just the most, the deadliest of war since World War ii. I did not know that.

[01:08:16] **Johann Hari:** 6 million, 6 million people died. Um, it begins in 2007. There's a, I think it's 2007. There's debate about when it ends, cuz I mean, arguably it hasn't ended. Uh, I mean, it's less violent than it was places like the kis. There's still a lot of, uh, violence going on there. Um, and I sent what I wrote about the war in the drc to, to, to Chomsky.

[01:08:36] And he said, I'm, this is really interesting. I'm gonna be in London. Why don't we meet up? So then we met. and we became friends. And actually for the last 12 years, I mean, I'll, it'll take me a thousand years more, but I've been writing a biography of him. So I've interviewed huge numbers. I've interviewed him a huge amount and loads of his friends and people who know him.

[01:08:54] And so, yeah, it's, it ended up being this really, uh, and he's one of the most remarkable people, probably the most remarkable person I know. Um, but manufacturing consent in particular, I think is a hugely important book for anyone to read. And it's an attempt for him to answer what he calls Orwell's problem, which is given that this is a free society and we live in free societies, we are not, you and I will never be put in prison for our political views.

[01:09:22] We are incredibly free given that we are so free. How come we know so little and challenge power so little, right? And, and what manufacturing consent does is it looks. Very scientifically and forensically. And Ed Herman, who I also knew, who, who, who I also interviewed, who, um, co-wrote the book, um, would point out, you know, it was very much co-writing.

[01:09:46] Um,

[01:09:47] **Neil Pasricha:** he passed away a few years ago,

[01:09:48] **Johann Hari:** yeah, they, yeah, yeah, no, still with us. He's 94 in a few days. But the, um, incredibly, uh, and he's in Brazil as well. He was there for the election. Um, but the, um, so what they do, what manufacturing consent shows is the ways in which. In an authoritarian society, propaganda doesn't need to be very good if you lived in back to the Soviet Union.

[01:10:13] But even if you live in Russia today, it doesn't really matter whether you believe what you read in Pravda or it's contemporary equivalence. Because if you get out of line, the government will just beat the shit out of you and send you to prison. Right? It doesn't actually matter whether you believe it very much.

[01:10:28] The system does not demand your consent. It just demands that you shut the fuck up. Right? Whereas in a free society, propaganda is much more important in a free society. They have to, they have to really persuade us that this is the best possible system, or at least a system that we should support, right?

[01:10:46] And so propaganda is much more powerful and sophisticated, and he points out, it largely happens through diffuse centers of power, which are not, it's not like a conspiracy. No one gets together and goes wahaha, like a bon villain. It, it's much more subtle. So our media are overwhelmingly owned by.

[01:11:07] Billionaires and funded by advertising. Right? And so what that does is it creates a system where in order for the news to reach you, it has to pass through several filters. It has to meet the approval of the billionaire owners, and it has to meet the approval of the advertisers. Now, this happens very subtly.

[01:11:27] It's not like it's rare that the owner would say, don't say that. It's rare that an advertiser would say,

[01:11:32] **Neil Pasricha:** Well, we saw advertisers all pause on Elon, right? Like, so right away it's the same idea.

[01:11:37] **Johann Hari:** Well, you internalize the interest of the people who pay your wages. Right? Anyone listening? Most

[01:11:43] **Neil Pasricha:** why I have no ad. That's partly why I have no ads on this show. Cause I don't, I don't wanna be constricted to a length of focus, the topic or anything even subconsciously.

[01:11:52] **Johann Hari:** exactly. And most people listening will have a boss, and most of them, Have never needed to be told, don't criticize your boss. Right. You, you just know you're not a fool. Right? So it's not that anyone says to you, don't criticize the advertisers, don't criticize the owners, but more importantly, you, you, you learn to muffle criticism of people like the owners and the advertisers.

[01:12:14] I just wanna say that we have a media that doesn't take on power. We do sometimes it does it very bravely and boldly, but it does it within certain confines and it, and it, and it's partly about where our attention gets directed. So for example, in manufacturing consent, it's a very helpful comparison. So, um, most people will know, but for those who don't, um, during the Cold War, um, obviously the Soviet Union controlled Eastern Europe and there was a war for control of Central America between forces that were backed by the Soviet Union and forces that were backed by the United States and the wider kind of western world.

[01:12:51] And. around the same time. There were, um, I think it was two priests who were killed in Poland. And at the same time, or roughly the same time, there were some nuns who were raped and some of them murdered, if I remember correctly, by American backed forces in El Salvador. And they compare the coverage that was given to the Polish priests and the El Salvador, the nuns in El Salvador, they were actually American nuns in El Salvador, if I remember rightly, they were from the United States.

[01:13:22] The killing of the priests in Poland was rightly given enormous coverage. Front page, massive week after week, right? The coverage of the people killed by the American backed f um, raped and killed by the American backed forces in El Salvador. It wasn't unreported, but it was tiny. It was hedged with caveats in a way you never caveat, rightly, never caveat.

[01:13:48] You know when a Soviet tyranny kills people, um, it was tiny. It was caveated. Now why would that be? Right? Because we look upon the crimes of our allies with excuses. We minimize, we play it down. We've internalized the power system that says, oh, our kind of power is good. And if there's bad things to happen, it must be an exception.

[01:14:11] There must have been a reason these things happen. Whereas official enemies, um, who oppose our power system, we can see in a much more clear-eyed way their crimes. Indeed, we may even exaggerate their crimes in some cases. Although there was no need to exaggerate the crimes of the Soviet Union because there were so immense and so depraved, um, and killed at least 30 million people across.

[01:14:33] Whole lifespan of the Soviet Union. Um, so there's no need to exaggerate that. But there are other instances of course where there were exaggeration. We mentioned Iraq again, Saddam Hussein, monstrous crimes. But we know that there was conscious exaggeration around his weapons and mass destruction to create a false pretext for the war.

[01:14:48] So what Chomsky's doing, what manufacturing consent does, it makes you realize the news you are receiving is passing through a filter that is not just let's you know, the famous, extremely annoying thing that's printed on the front page of the New York Times every day, all the news

[01:15:03] **Neil Pasricha:** is fit

[01:15:03] **Johann Hari:** print, right.

[01:15:05] That in fact what you're seeing is, I mean, the New York Times has actually got significantly better since manufacturing consent came out. And I think in a way the manufacturing consent helps us to understand. Now the New York Times gets half of its funding directly from readers, right? That's more

[01:15:21] **Neil Pasricha:** just saw a sta on that. It's, it's gone from advertising to readers almost like a huge flip, which is wonderful.

[01:15:28] **Johann Hari:** which means the New York Times is less dependent on advertisers and less dependent on owners, which I think is why it's probably a bit more open-minded when it comes to foreign policy now, and actually less slavishly adherent to a kind of much more narrow understanding of American, uh, interests and foreign policy.

[01:15:46] So, yeah. So the thing we manufacturing consent. It's true. So many of chomsky's, well, most of people can watch the documentary of it. I think it's on YouTube, uh, it's just called Manufacturing Consent. Um, is you never see the world again the same way once you've read manufacturing consent. It's a, it, it gives you, you know, the things he's describing.

[01:16:08] Some of them are conscious that manufacturing consent is not a phrase from Chomsky and Hermann. It's a fra from Walter Lipman, who was the most influential New York Times. Columnist, journalist of his generation in the 1920s and 1930s who said, the job of the media is to manufacture consent. Right? Our job is to make people get in line behind the government.

[01:16:29] So it's, this is not a concept they came up with, right? This is a, a, a concept that they are describing, having observed in the world, and they give very forensic, scientific evidence for it. Um,

[01:16:41] **Neil Pasricha:** But it's, we need, we need some of that. I mean, don't you think we need, not, not some, but we need to have a little bit of sense of, uh, a nation state, you know, that, that, uh, you know, people have pointed out that

this didn't exist for, you know, until 500 years ago we came up with nation states and it's just, there's just an article saying that the percentage of players that are in the World Cup right now who are, you know, newly joining the nation state, they play for , you know, is, is an all time high.

[01:17:11] Um, I remember after nine 11, you, you mentioned Op Oprah earlier, you know, she said, why would someone do this to us? And I remember it was like a national, if not international awakening to sort of some of these historical things about the US going and it's long-term relationship with that country. But that wasn't reported.

[01:17:29] Like I didn't grow up reading a lot about, you know, giving weapons to bin Laden. It was just not a big thing as, as big as kind of the ramifications of it. So we need some sense of togetherness, don't you think? I mean, not consent as it sounds. So doctrine. It sounds like doctrine, but we need, don't you think we need to have, what I'm hinting at here is we're losing almost all of the sense of togetherness is like the, the sense of nation states, the sense of identities.

[01:17:55] Those are all changing really quickly.

[01:17:57] **Johann Hari:** sure, we need to build truthful things around which we can unite, but those truthful things should not be pillaging and destroying other countries. I know you're not saying it is, but the, so for example, I'm British, right? And, um, you know, there's all sorts of different stories we can tell about Britain that, that we might think would be, you know, so we can tell a horrendous forcibly nostalgic story about Britain that, look, we were the country that ruled the world.

[01:18:27] We were the country that in a lot of this resurfaces every net when the queen died, you get a bit of that coming back. Um, although actually the queen herself, to be fair to her, was not, uh, imperialist in that sense. But the.

[01:18:42] you know, there's a form of British nationalism that's rah rah, rural Britannia. You know, we are the, we were the greatest country in the world and we ruled over all these other people, which to me is a catastrophic form of self-identity. It's partly what led us to Brexit. You know, the, that we were amazed that we could withdraw from the European Union and then not have the benefits of being in the European Union.

[01:19:02] And you go, right, we don't rule the world anymore. If you don't wanna be a member of the gym, you can't go and use the gym equipment, right? Um, but then, so we wanna dismantle stories like that, which harmful to us are

more importantly insulting to the people that we murdered. Um, but. That doesn't mean we wanna be left with no story.

[01:19:22] We wanna be te we wanna tell a positive story. And I love my country and there's a million positive stories to tell about our country, you know, that we are, uh, I mean, for me it would be about our sense of humor. The fact that we're a country that provides healthcare for everyone. The fact that, you know, I mean all sorts of things.

[01:19:37] We're a country that defeated the Nazis. There's a lines are great things you can say about Britain with, you know Yeah. Of Monty Python. You know, there's a million great things we can say about Britain, right? I mean, for me, the thing I'm most patriotic about is our sense of humor. But the one thing I would wave the flag for is we are objectively funnier than everyone else.

[01:19:54] Uh, and I will not hear any dis contradiction at that point. But the, and we have a very distinctive sense of humor as British people that we all share. Um, the, yeah. So yeah, we need to tell positive stories, but that's different to manufacturing consent. Right. That's. . That's the thing we share. That you're identifying and building a story together that's very different to saying, we need to manipulate these people in order to make them passive in the face of us, pillaging other countries or killing people.

[01:20:25] **Neil Pasricha:** How, how do you think about staying informed today? How do you stay informed and how do you think about that in your own life and what do you consume to do that?

[01:20:36] **Johann Hari:** Well, on my Kindle, every day I get the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Times The Guardian and the Wall Street Journal, and

[01:20:42] **Neil Pasricha:** So you're, you're doing a five paper skim a day.

[01:20:44] **Johann Hari:** I mean, I ski, I skim them. I don't, I wouldn't,

[01:20:46] **Neil Pasricha:** No, no, no. I know. But just even, just start there. You, you're going to five.

[01:20:52] **Johann Hari:** yeah. But that's, you know, I, yeah, it's, I mean, I. I'm very well informed about the news, so it doesn't take me that long to read them. And I, you know, I subscribe to lots of magazines and I read lots of books and I

try to think in a critical and thoughtful way. And obviously I do a lot of reporting all over the world for my books.

[01:21:12] Um,

[01:21:13] **Neil Pasricha:** How, what does the average , how does the average person who's looking at what's trending on Twitter as the news? And I'm, and I, and I'll, I'll throw myself in the average, like I, I've canceled newspaper and magazine subscriptions. I do heavily read books, but there are a lot slower progression in terms of what's staying current.

[01:21:30] I often get accused of not knowing what's going on, cuz I'm, I'm kind of, you know, I, you know, it's, it's the, uh, thorough quote, read not the times, read the, read the eternities. You know, I, I, I sort of,

[01:21:45] **Johann Hari:** Like, different people have different priorities in their lives and, you know, uh, certainly my brother and sister don't, you know, would get their news, wouldn't, wouldn't ever read a newspaper or anything like that. They're busy. They're, they're exhausted, you know, like, I'm not in any way critical of people who secede from those things, or, you know, my grandmother was raised by my grandmother whose job was to clean toilets.

[01:22:07] She didn't have time to sit around reading newspapers either. It, it, it's not about a kind of, um, I think it's also about people. Your Susan Sontag in her book, uh, on regarding the pain of others, talks about this idea of compassion fatigue. And she said it's not. People get fatigued by compassion, they get fatigued by seeing suffering and feeling there's nothing they can do about it.

[01:22:29] In a similar way, I don't think most people are actually information fatigued. I think they're fatigued by the feeling they don't have anything they can do about it. That that many agency over it. And the truth is we do have a lot of power in agency. You know, whether it's joining labor unions, there's all sorts of ways in which we can fight back and, and actually produce change.

[01:22:49] Right. Again, think about what we're saying about me being gay, right? You've got 2000 years of gay people being burned, imprisoned, persecuted, and really in the

[01:22:59] **Neil Pasricha:** St. St. Still, still illegal in the majority of the world today.

[01:23:02] **Johann Hari:** sure, but you think about the, and and of course there's gay, gay movements all over the world, uh,

[01:23:07] **Neil Pasricha:** Come up again with the World Cup and stuff though.

[01:23:10] **Johann Hari:** sure.

[01:23:10] Of course. With Qatar, my friend Patrick Wick did great reporting about. Horrific homophobia and Qatar, and I recommend people read it as in the I newspaper in Britain. Uh, you can read it online, it's Patrick Strudwick. Um, but um, sure, but you think about the staggering transformation that's taken place on that front right now that happened because, you know, the first gay pride, um, parade in London happened in 1973.

[01:23:37] They were all beaten. There were 20 of them. They were beaten up and arrested by the police. I know one of the people who was dead beats Tael, right? I think I've got the year right. You compare that to now, incredible changes can happen when people fight for them. The power systems and nothing that relates to manufacturing consent.

[01:23:53] Systems of power want you to think that you are helpless in the face of them, right? Whether that's Mark Zuckerberg or the lead industry or whoever it might be, they want you to feel powerless. They want you not to know your power. But actually, it's one of the things Tom Gilman says that the reason they have this elaborate propaganda system is because, They know that if you did know what was happening, you could act right.

[01:24:19] You know, think about something as simple as during the Iraq war, uh, to go back to where my interactions with Chomsky began. You know, Amy Goodman, a friend of noms who presents democracy now, always said If all the news channels every day were just showing the dead children, the war would've ended in three days.

[01:24:36] Right. If that had been the thing we saw, not the endless propaganda, not these, he's just, here is what is actually happening here is the child that was incinerated this morning with your tax

[01:24:45] **Neil Pasricha:** Not the

[01:24:45] **Johann Hari:** The war would've ended in Yeah, the war would've ended. You know, there would've been mass, public pressure in the war would've ended as indeed happened in Vietnam.

[01:24:53] It took a while, but it took too long. And 3 million Vietnamese people died along with, um,

[01:24:58] **Neil Pasricha:** But you're right, there's some stark images that I can conjure up in my head immediately when you talk about that. And it's the, it's the young girl running naked from Napalm. You know, like it's things like,

[01:25:07] **Johann Hari:** Who now lives in your city? Toronto.

[01:25:09] **Neil Pasricha:** Oh, I didn't know that.

[01:25:11] **Johann Hari:** yeah. Amazing woman. Um, I'm black. You I name, but, um,

[01:25:14] **Neil Pasricha:** It's the first name of anybody you don't know. You, you've got like, it's like an unbelievable, okay, we could go deeper on here, but I'm also wanting to kind of just move us forward a bit. You read consent, so 15, you know, ish, you know, when you read, when you read, um, the first book, which I've got the name she must have known.

[01:25:32] Then you're like 23 when you first kind of start this relationship with no, which I'm fascinated to hear about. And this, this is kind of a really interesting, you know, long-term conversation with you about this biography that you're working on. How cool is that? And then finally, the third formative book you've given us today.

[01:25:50] And I, I did not see these, these things connecting the dots and you're connecting them so nicely for us. The anatomy of a moment, 35 minutes in history and imagination by, I think it's pronounced Javier Circus, published circus published in 2009, circus.

[01:26:06] **Johann Hari:** I got this. Yeah, , I got this wrong for many years as well. My Spanish friends were like, you gotta get this right,

[01:26:12] **Neil Pasricha:** C A S published in Spanish in 2009. Then in English in 2011, covers like a black and white image of a lieutenant, addressing the parliament with civil guards, brandishing guns. Um, What is this about? Well, in February, 1981, Spain was emerging from the dictator Franco's shadow, holding a Democratic vote by the new for the new Prime Minister, and was filmed on tv, which at the time was like, this is also on tv.

[01:26:38] While it was filmed on tv, a band of right wing soldiers burst into the room with automatic weapons, ordered everyone to get down, and only three men defied the order. Three very different men for very different reasons. For 35 minutes, as the cameras rolled, they stayed in their seats. Critically adored novelist, Javier Cercas, I got it wrong again.

[01:26:58] Describes the archival footage in vivid detail and produces a daring account of this watershed moment in Spanish history. Dewey Decimal has filed 1 9 4 0 0.084. Democracy slash dictatorships. Johan, tell us about your relationship with the anatomy of a moment. 35 minutes in history and imagination.

[01:27:19] **Johann Hari:** Yeah, I, Sarcas Sy Cast is I think one of the greatest writers living today. A completely extraordinary writer. I've read lots of these books now and they're all brilliant. But you know, a lot of people hearing your description would of course have thought about January 6th. This is a very similar event in many ways.

[01:27:38] So you'd had, Spain had been frozen in dictatorship from the end of the Civil War in the 1940s until the death of Franco in the mid to late 1970s. And General Franco disgusting far right figure, responsible for horrendous crimes, uh, and real suppression of the people of Spain. And they emerge from Franco and they've had this rocky period, relatively brief period, I think it's four years of democracy.

[01:28:08] And they're swearing in, it's the first Democratic transition, and they're swearing in the new pro minister and sudden and live on television. A group of Franco is gunmen nostalgic for the fascist dictatorship and determine to reimpose it, break into the Cortez, which is the Spanish parliament, and order all the senators to get down on the ground.

[01:28:29] And like you say, three men refuse to get down on the ground and challenge the gunman in different ways. And the anatomy moment is the story of that moment and these three men and the legacy of that moment. And I mean, it's an astonishingly powerful, um, it's a, it's a novel, but it's based on very tightly on factual events.

[01:28:52] And the three men who challenge them. Were extraordinarily unlikely figures. They were all washed up and hated by their own side. So one of them was the outgoing Prime Minister, Adolfo Suarez, who was discredited. Uh, the country wasn't doing well, kind of hated, had been sort of in the right wing camp, had sort of was seen to have not really done a very good job at all.

[01:29:21] There was the communist leaders, Santiago Corillo, who was despised by his own side. He'd cut a deal in order to persuade them to legalize the Communist Party. He had cut a deal that said that the communist would not in any way try to get justice for the enormous crimes against communists. That happened during the Civil War.

[01:29:42] So hated despised by his own side, washed up. And the other one was the Deputy Prime Minister Gutierrez Malto, who, um, in some ways is the most unlikely of all. He had been a f quite close to Franco. He was a francoist, he'd been a very senior military figure. Um, and these three men, all the other senators get down on the ground more than a hundred of them.

[01:30:06] And these three men just will not go along with the coup. And it's interesting. So, um, they, they challenge it in their different ways. Um, Mado was just incensed by the insubordination of it, right? It's just like, no, we have a military chain of command. And he just, and he's a very old man at that time. I think he was in his eighties, just says, stand down, these are not your orders.

[01:30:29] Stand down. Um, and these three men, what, what, what what Sy cast then does is kind of pull back and tell the story of these three men who hated each other. And indeed, I don't wanna give too much away, but one had nearly caused the death of another one much earlier in the, in, in, in the story in Spain. I don't wanna say any more than that.

[01:30:52] and he really pulls back to see this moment as a moment about democracy, about Spain. But to me, and it's an incredibly important book about how democracy gets saved or does not get saved a moment, that's a question that is it a pressing urgency to all of us for reasons your listeners don't need me to explain.

[01:31:12] Um, but to me it's even more important than that. It's a story about the amazing unpredictability of other people, right? You know, the, the, the great movie, the Philadelphia story, there's a, a line in it that the Katherine Hepburn character says, the time to make your ti, the time to make your mind up about someone is never right.

[01:31:33] These three men were the most unlikely people to challenge these gun men, right? They were the last people you would expect to be brave. They had not been brave. They were washed up, right? They did the right. You never know who will do the right thing. I think about January the sixth. I for reasons. All your listeners, I'm sure can guess, loathe Mike Pence.

[01:31:54] He, every single thing he's done in his life, I detest, he's a vile homophobe. He stands for all the things I dislike. And yet there was one moment when we needed Mike Pence to do the right thing and he did it. You never know. The, one of the great things about human beings is we're so unpredictable, right?

[01:32:17] You don't know who's gonna, someone can be awful and awful and awful, and then do the right thing. We're talking about British patriotism. Winston Churchill was a wicked man who did terrible things in what were called Britain's colonies. Really terrible things. And yet, at one moment, he did absolutely the right, brave and necessary thing when almost no one else around him did, when in terms of resisting the Nazis.

[01:32:41] So you never know. And and to me, so much of Sy Cass's work is about this instability in people and about. . Um, obviously the anatomy of moment in particular is about democracy, but the, so much of c cast's work is about letting people be complex and allowing people their complexity. You know, another writer, I really love

[01:33:04] **Neil Pasricha:** There's all three books. By the way. All three of yours seem to have that in common.

[01:33:07] **Johann Hari:** Yeah, you have to,

[01:33:09] **Neil Pasricha:** and embracing of the gray that is underneath the reality that we experience.

[01:33:13] **Johann Hari:** well, you know, there's a, there's a, um, David Grossman, the Israeli novelist who I really love and people haven't read any of his work I've recommended, starting with to the ends of the Earth. But Grossman, um, was given an award maybe seven or eight years ago by the Israeli government, and it was a very right wing Israeli government, sadly just restored to power led by Benjamin Netanyahu and, um, I forget his name, but the culture minister at the time was a, a Grossman as a man of the left.

[01:33:40] His son died tragically in the war in Lebanon, um, in 2017. And, Oh no. Early in that 2016. Um, and, and it was a very right wing government and he was given an award kind of culture award, and people said to him he shouldn't go and accept the award because the government was right wing. And, um, the, the, the culture minister whose name I'm blanking on, who lives in a, in a settlement on the West Bank, a very right wing culture minister, um, gave this

quite heartfelt tribute to reading Grossman's novels and said that they moved him.

[01:34:15] And Grossman said this very moving thing. He said, we have to allow people their complexity. , right. We are living in a culture partly cuz of the social media dynamics we just talked about and many others that is constantly trying to simplify people into goodies and baddies and, and, and we are the good people who don't have to worry about us cause we're not complex, we're good and we get to rage against the bad people and destroy them and condemn them.

[01:34:40] And, and this has really actually infected a lot of novels as well. We like . I won't say the novel, but I was in a bookstore yesterday. and I started reading a novel that's been very ACC clanged, just the first few pages wanted to read it. And I noticed one of the, one of the blurbs for it was a searing indictment of I thought, Jesus, that's absolutely not what you want.

[01:34:59] A novel to be a fucking indictment. That's not, novels are not submissions to a courtroom when you're like an indictment. No. Right. That precisely what you want is what, what great novel have you ever read? Could you describe as an indictment? It's awful. It's the antithesis of what fiction should be. Uh, not to say that fiction can't show that some things were terrible.

[01:35:21] You could say, beloved by Tony Morrison is an unambiguously great novel. And at some level is it an indictment of slavery? Well, yeah, but if you were gonna describe the 10 great qualities of Beloved, you wouldn't, that wouldn't be in

[01:35:32] **Neil Pasricha:** Well, who knows if that blurb is like, you know, plucked by the publisher because it's more viral, right?

[01:35:38] **Johann Hari:** But I'm not, but, but in itself that is revealing

[01:35:40] **Neil Pasricha:** yeah. That's not what you want. You,

[01:35:42] **Johann Hari:** You know? Yeah. And I didn't read the novel, so I, you know, I only read a little bit. The novel did seem like it was quite a polemical novel. And I'm not saying there's no value in that, but yeah, you, you, you have to, we have to hold the ground for complexity.

[01:35:56] Doesn't mean complexity paralyzes us. It doesn't mean we don't act. There's all sorts of people in the world. You need to be stopped. There's all sorts

of things we need to fight for. Complexity is not paralysis. On the contrary, acknowledging complexity will make you a better actor in the world. And that's partly what anatomy of the moment, anatomy moment is about. These people didn't act despite their complexity at this moment when we needed them. They acted because of their complexity and, and, and so yeah, holding the ground for complexity and ambiguity and not making your mind up about people and allowing a little bit of space. And, you know, frankly, January the fifth, 2020 I made, I had my mind made up about Mike Pence.

[01:36:40] Right. I didn't, you know, and there you go. Sometimes people unmake your mind for you. Doesn't mean I still don't disagree with him on almost everything else. Doesn't mean I wouldn't strongly want to stop him if he runs for president. But you get, you have to allow people, like Grossman said, you have to allow people their complexity and you have to not try and sort the world into this kind of mannequin and the forces of light and the forces of darkness.

[01:37:07] It's a very destructive way of thinking. It's destructive for yourself. If you think of yourself as the forces of light, it will license you to do cruel things. And we see that all the time. Online, offline, people who believe they are. If you believe that you are licensed to, because you are the forces of good.

[01:37:24] That will, you'll end, actually end up being very cruel cuz you won't have humility and you won't think about your own, um, capacity for cruelty. Um, and if you think of other people as the forces of darkness, y you're just gonna miss a lot of what's happening. I'm not saying there aren't dark things happening.

[01:37:41] Of course there are. I'm not saying there aren't things that need to be stopped. I passionately believe there are. But you have to be able to think in a more complex way. And to me that's one of the great benefits of books you're choosing to give a huge amount of time to thinking about something. If you're doing that, you probably don't want it to be simplistic and making the same point over and over again.

[01:38:00] You want to delve into complexity and that's the great one of, I mean, there's many, but one of the great merits of making time in your life to read books.

[01:38:14] **Neil Pasricha:** Wow. Um, I'm, I'm feeling richer, uh, through this conversation. I've come in, uh, you've heard me with, with even, you know, views that feel uncomfortable to me because they're so polarizing, even to my

own mind, and you've helped me kind of crack 'em open. The time to make up your mind about someone is never embrace the complexity.

[01:38:34] Complexity is not paralysis. Johann Hari, I have a feeling we could go hours and hours and hours more is a treat to talk to somebody whose work is so impactful, not just to me personally, but to, you know, really millions of people at this point. And, um, if you don't, if you're listening to this and you don't have a copy of *Stolen Focus*, absolutely get it.

[01:38:55] Embrace it, leave it, even leaving it on your shelf itself. As, as a, the, the front cover. I find it just jostles me into like, you know, paying attention to what, to what matters. And of course, I, my entry point into your workers with chasing the screen, which I also highly recommend. I know you're not, um, I know it isn't the, the current book, but it's, it's, it's such a deeply impactful book. To me, this has been a real gift, and I really wanna say a deep thank you for coming on three books.

[01:39:23] It really means a lot to our listeners of book lovers around the world. We're so grateful to you for this.

[01:39:28] **Johann Hari:** oh, I really enjoyed it, Neil. Thank you so much. And, um, I meant to say all my publishers tase me that if anyone wants to know where to get the books or audio books or the books we talked about, if you go to johannhari.com, um, you can, um, you can see it there. Um, you know, I got in trouble a few years ago on a podcast at the end.

[01:39:52] This is when I was still promoting my social media, which I don't do anymore. I'm gonna, and next year I'm off social media completely when I finish my next book as I finished my next book. But the, um, got in trouble at that of an interview because, um, the interview said to me, what's your Twitter? And I said it.

[01:40:06] And he said, what's your Facebook? And I said it. And he said, what's your Instagram? And I said it. And he said, what's your Snapchat? And I said, I am a 40, I must be 41 then. I'm a 41 year old man. The only 41 year old men on Snapchat are definitely pedophiles. Right. While are they on there? And he didn't laugh.

[01:40:23] And I had this bad thing when I make a joke and someone doesn't laugh that I go lean in further. This is a very British habit. And I said, you know that TV show to catch a predator where they sort of catfish pedophiles? I said,

the next season of to catch predator should literally just be, they go up to adult men in the street and.

[01:40:38] What is your Snapchat handle? And if they have one, immediately arrest them. Right? Oh, he still didn't laugh later. I looked him up. He's a 50 year old man who's very active on Snapchat, so I accidentally called him a pedophile interview inadvertently calling you a pedophile.

[01:40:55] **Neil Pasricha:** Uh,

[01:40:56] **Johann Hari:** my,

[01:40:57] **Neil Pasricha:** no, no, no. And, and I like that you're directing people to, to johan har rate.com. I think that is an aspirational goal for me too. I aspire to deleting all my social media. Your friend Sam Harris deleted his two and a half million person account yesterday as we're talking. Yeah, as we're

[01:41:13] **Johann Hari:** of my score.

[01:41:14] **Neil Pasricha:** It doesn't say, it just says the account does not exist.

[01:41:17] And so it's, it, it's, it's so that, so I aspire to do that for myself. I've started creating email lists and websites and podcasts and places that are untethered from the algorithms. And so three books.co will also have a detailed list and a detailed show notes of every single thing we mention, every quote, every movie, every book.

[01:41:37] I'll

[01:41:37] **Johann Hari:** And Neil, you're, you're doing the right thing because you know we're all gonna be dead quite soon. And you don't want people at your funeral to stand up and go, well, what did Neil do with his life? He tweeted a lot. That's not what you want people to say, right? You, you, you have a very limited amount of time in which to be alive, and then you are dead forever.

[01:41:56] You're completely died,

[01:41:57] **Neil Pasricha:** yeah,

[01:41:58] **Johann Hari:** So in the interim, fill it with interesting things. You know that, what's the Mary Oliver line? What will you do with your one world

and precious life? Tweeting is not one of the things you should do with your world and precious life. Your one world and precious life, right? Uh, so yeah, the, you are doing the right thing,

[01:42:15] **Neil Pasricha:** These kind of conversations make me think that, and I really appreciate you for coming on.

[01:42:20] **Johann Hari:** oh, well I'm gonna text Sam now and ask him what happened. Great.