

## **You're Actually Not a Badass and Here's Why – Scott Barry Kaufman with Dave Asprey – #775**

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's guest is, you ready for this, a humanistic psychologist exploring the depths of human potential. How's that for a great introduction? This psychologist, his name is Scott Barry Kaufman. He's a PhD, but he teaches about intelligence, creativity and well-being at Columbia, NYU and UPenn, which is the best of those three schools, hands down. In fact, it's completely proven and it's also better than Harvard and Stanford, in case you guys are wondering. Anyway, I might or might not be from that same school. What he did that was really interesting, and why he's on the show today, is that he discovered Abraham Maslow's unfinished theory of transcendence, the one you didn't hear about. It was in unpublished journals and lectures and essays and he said, "Wait a minute. I'm working on the same kind of stuff." If you guys don't know who Maslow is, he developed the hierarchy of human needs. So Scott dug into the theory and updated it with seven decades of science that's happened since Abraham Maslow was out there.

And that's what's in his new book, which is called The New Science of Self-Actualization and the main title is Transcend. So you want to know about attachment, connection, creativity, love and purpose? Well, it turns out there's a bit of knowledge in the interview today. Scott, welcome to the show.

Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D.:

Oh, well, thanks for having me here.

Dave:

You're also an old school podcaster like me. I mean, we go way back in the day. You've been running The Psychology Podcast since 2014.

Scott:

It feels like an ancient podcast at this point, yeah.

Dave:

And right after you launched your podcast, Business Insider called you one of 50 groundbreaking scientists changing the way we see the world. Did that give you a big ego?

Scott:

No, I think I probably already had a big ego already.

Dave:

There's nothing funnier than asking psychology people about egos, because you can see the wheels turning. I just love doing that.

Scott:

Oh, we can talk all day long about the ego and the difference between ego and having a strong sense of self. I think, yeah, so just to answer your question, I mean, I already felt like I was pretty self-confident at that point, but it made me feel good. Definitely made me feel good.

Dave:

You're also, just to fluff your ego a little bit more, you've written nine books, which is pretty epic. I know you're a full professor at Columbia, so you've really dug deep on the psychology side. Why do you write so many books?

Scott:

I love writing. I mean, I feel like I have a writer's soul. If I had to identify what my soul is, it feels like a writer. I've always enjoyed it. When I was a little kid, I used to do a lot of creative writing. I used to always imagine different worlds and things and I enjoy it. I also enjoy public science communication and felt like writing peer reviewed scientific papers, which I still do from time to time, but when I was really heavy in writing scientific peer reviewed papers and you put your heart and soul into the study and then you write it up and then you get all these reviews from your colleagues saying how much it sucks. And then even if it does get accepted, you wait four years for it to get published. By that time you don't even care about the paper anymore, but then when it does come out, you're excited if one person reads it. So I decided, "You know what? Books are a much quicker route to making an impact on the world."

Dave:

I've talked to a few academics who've published professionally for everyone to read and sometimes they get looked down on by colleagues, like, "Oh, well, you didn't do the self-flagellation academic publishing route," like somehow you're less relevant as an academic. Did you get flack for just saying, "I'm going to take my research directly to people who could benefit from it"?

Scott:

I did. Oh, absolutely. I was a rebel in grad school because, so Psychology Today blogs just started in 2008, and I get a call from one of the editors there. They're like, "Hey, would you like to be one of our first bloggers?" And that lit me up and I started writing blog posts about intelligence. And my advisor took me aside. He was like, "This ain't going to get..." Isn't, I should say. "This isn't going to get you tenure. This isn't going to get you tenure. You really need to rethink what you're doing with your life." And I said, "I did rethink what I'm doing with my life and I'm not going into academia."

Dave:

But you did go into academia, right?

Scott:

Well, I never did the tenure route. So I've always, just right after grad school and from that point forward, I took... So for instance, I ran the Imagination Institute at Penn with Martin Seligman, who is the founder of the field of positive psychology, and that's an alternative route. I wasn't actually in proper academia with tenure track and papers. Instead it was a lot more fun. Marty and I held all these Imagination Retreats and we sought out the most imaginative minds on the planet and across these various fields and we brought them to Penn for a weekend and we'd scan their brains and we did all this other stuff. It's just more fun.

Dave:

Yet you still succeeded academically. Your area of interest, it seems like if I was to map you out some sort of Venn diagram, clearly intelligence is at the beginning, but you talk about the psychology of created writing and mating intelligence. So is intelligence, creativity or mating at the center of your Venn diagram?

Scott:

Well, honestly, the mating thing, that was just a phase I went through.

Dave:

You got it out of your system?

Scott:

Yeah, if you look at all my books and my whole body of life's work, that's the one stain on my career.

Dave:

That was the outlier book, to be honest, I [crosstalk 00:06:08]. But you write about greatness. You're circling the realms of human performance that I'm most interested in-

Scott:

Human potential.

Dave:

Human potential. In fact, I have this thing called the Human Potential Institute. That's my coaching group with about 1,000 coaches. So human potential is at the center and those are all in human potential.

Scott:

Yeah, I think that's my thing.

Dave:

What is the craziest thing that humans are capable of that people don't know about?

Scott:

Don't know about? Holy cow, what a question that is. Because people, this may sound really banal, but I wrote once, I was writing a tweet or something, one of the most profound realizations one can have is that you can feel a certain way and you're allowed to say, "Nah, I'm good." That's what the tweet said. So basically the point there, a lot of people don't realize that they can actually divorce their mind and have a lot more psychological free will. Now whether or not we have big bang level free will is a whole different discussion we need to do under some influences. But whether or not we have psychological free will, I think we have a lot more psychological free will than we realize and sometimes I think it's an act of craziness to exert it.

Dave:

Wow. So it's the ability to lie about our internal state to others or to ourselves?

Scott:

Not to lie, but to not listen to ourselves.

Dave:

To ignore ourselves?

Scott:

To have that choice, at least, that freedom. Sometimes we want to, obviously, listen to ourselves, but to have that freedom, to have that flexibility is something we often don't even realize we have that flexibility. You mean I didn't have to do that compulsive thing that I do every Tuesday at 4:00? Oh, no, I didn't.

Dave:

That's cool. That's not what I would have expected. I was hoping you'd say levitating or something. And I was going to say, "I knew it."

Scott:

I almost wish I could have come on the spot with something more creative.

Dave:

That's actually really perceptive, but it's because you study psychology and human potential like you do. I was also really intrigued in that you talk about the stuff that Maslow didn't finish. He just died in the middle of it or can you give me a little bit of background on that?

Scott:

He did die in the middle of it and just in the last couple of years of his life, he was working on a whole, new theory of transcendency, had stated at a conference, not a conference, at a talk at a church, a Unitarian church in San Francisco. He gave this big talk, The Farther Reaches of Human Nature. I listened to the lecture recording of it. It was a very transcendent experience for me. I listened to the lecture recording of it and he says, "Above self-actualization, once we have our basic needs met, then we can have our self-actualizing needs met, but for the very fortunate who have those needs met to a certain satisfactory degree, well, we can start to reach this level of transcendence." Now I don't know if he used the word level, because life is not like a video game where you get these different levels. We can harness this transcendence in our lives and we can be motivated by what he called the B values, the values of pure being, the values in life that you don't engage in them and you're not one with them because you want something else.

You're happy just in and of itself to get intrinsic joy from seeking justice and the way you get intrinsic joy from beauty, more beauty in the world, more meaning in the world, from these peak experiences, this most wondrous experiences of life, that life can bring us. Yeah, he was working this whole new theory. And then he died of a heart attack at 62.

Dave:

Those heart attacks are really annoying.

Scott:

Yeah, they suck.

Dave:

I've pretty much decided that the first step to living a long time is not dying.

Scott:

I think that's true.

Dave:

We're so profound with each other here, man.

Scott:

Well, it's funny because sometimes some people say things like, "I think," and then you can have a debate and there's an opinion. With this one, there's no debate here.

Dave:

Right. It's funny, though, because some people are like, "Oh, I'm not going to hate you." You should watch your cardiovascular risk because it's that or cancer or Alzheimer's or diabetes that's going to get you if you're playing the odds, so maybe you should dodge those bullets first in your hierarchy of needs climbing. It seems like those are the long periods, so it's always really frustrating to me when one of the big four takes out a luminary. And you're like, "It would have not been very difficult to have avoided that." It was usually bad knowledge and sometimes bad psychology that drives it. But usually people are generally doing what they think is the right thing. It's just the wrong thing. And then sometimes people are self-sabotaging.

Scott:

Self-sabotaging. I think that's probably more common, self-sabotaging. I think that the human will is a very fickle thing. I've never quite put it that way, but it's true.

Dave:

Yeah. It's when the pizza's in front of you, like, "Why do I have a piece of pizza in my hand? Why is it moving towards my mouth?"

Scott:

Yeah.

Dave:

No, I'm asking you because you're a psychologist.

Scott:

Oh, I thought it was like, "Because I'm eating pizza."

Dave:

I just did that to you. But what is the mechanism there inside us that makes us reach for stuff that we know at some level isn't really a good choice?

Scott:

Well, humans are cybernetic systems. I'll just get really into the nerdy in the [crosstalk 00:11:57] of this. So humans are cybernetic systems just like a thermodynamic system's a cybernetic system. There's no difference in terms of our understanding of goals and how goals work, but the interesting thing about humans is that we have evolutionary goals and we also have goals that we set in our own lives that have no evolutionary history. And so what we have is this hodgepodge of conflicting goals going on within us. We have, if you just think about the demeanor of romantic relationships, it is miraculous if a marriage works. You have the evolutionary evolved drives of, somehow all having to come together in a harmonious way, lust, caregiving, romantic passion, I don't know if I said, yeah, I said caregiving, romantic passion, attachment. All of these things come apart in different ways and evolve for different reasons across the course of human evolution.

Dave:

Why did you say lust three times?

Scott:

Because that's more of a memory issue and not a [crosstalk 00:13:02]. Yeah, I know you're joking. If you're hinting it's a Freudian thing, I think it's more I'm getting old. My memory ain't what it used to be. Psychology jokes. I love it. No, I love it. So, to me it's miraculous when you get an integrated harmonious human because turtles don't have this issue. Orangutans don't sit there thinking, "How can I become a harmonious, integrated orangutan?" But for the human that can have that wisdom and foresight and consciousness to create and design a life that allows them to somehow take this hodgepodge and be a whole, operating, harmonious unit, I think that's miraculous, quite frankly.

Dave:

It is miraculous and the idea of evolutionary drivers ended up becoming more and more a part of my work as a biohacker over time and I want to go through Maslow's hierarchy of needs and then how you've added transcendence on top, based on his original work. Then I want to run my theory past it and then I want you to just blow it up with a professor's ability to blow things up and tell me the holes in it or whether it matches as well as some people say, because you're a real expert on this. So walk our listeners through the basic hierarchy of needs. A lot of us remember it from seventh grade but probably not accurately.

Scott:

Traditional way it's taught is usually you see a pyramid and at the bottom of this pyramid, at the base, you get physiological needs, food, shelter, water important, then right above that are, "Okay, well, if we get our physiological needs met, then we can start to really focus on safety in a priority kind of way." If our safety needs are met, we feel pretty safe and secure, we have what Maslow called love and belonging needs, connection, intimacy with others. If that's met to a certain degree, then in terms of priority of the hierarchy, we have the need for esteem, which Maslow said is the esteem from others as well self-esteem, so both kind of forms of esteem. And if we can have those, he called all those things I just mentioned basic needs, if we can have those basic needs met, then we can put our all and our entire being into the need for self-actualization, which is becoming whatever we are most uniquely

capable of becoming in life. So that's how it's traditionally presented. If you look on the internet, there are memes of it with toilet paper at the bottom during the COVID as the most pressing need. You also see Wi-Fi.

For the past five or six years, I saw a lot of memes going with Wi-Fi at the bottom. You see all sorts of things. You see like the Maslow's hierarchy of constructive disagreement. So I've seen people just use that whole framework. The fascinating thing that most people don't realize is that Maslow never drew a pyramid.

Dave:

Oh, that's funny.

Scott:

There's no pyramid. I looked through almost every published thing, probably every published thing that Maslow's ever written and unpublished, and I was like, "Where's the pyramid?" And then Todd Bridgerman and his colleagues came out with this really cool paper tracing the origin of it and discovered where it actually started. The whole thing started with some management consultants in the 60s. It was first a stepladder before it became a pyramid. And in the stepladder of needs, there was the man at the top with a flag pole. It was the self-realized man.

Dave:

Wow.

Scott:

So there you go. It betrayed the spirit of Maslow, the whole pyramid. I don't think he would have liked a pyramid to represent his needs. I'd like to think how I re-imagined it, my Kaufman sailboat, is more in line with Maslow's spirit of it.

Dave:

What is the sailboat? How does that work?

Scott:

I just begged that question, didn't I? Well, so, do you want to pick up what I just threw down there? My little sailboat, Kaufman's theory, Kaufman's sailboat, my sailboat-

Dave:

There we go there.

Scott:

There we go. There we go. Well, I created the sailboat. But here's why I think it's a better depiction of the spirit of Maslow. I did want to give my brother man, Abraham Maslow, some credit. I wanted to restore the whole vision he had for human development. So human development, I think, is more of an experience through the vast unknown. We never know when the storm's going to come, when the waves are going to come crashing down on us, but we need at least to have no holes in our boat. So we need to have a secure, firm boat, our basic needs met to a certain degree or we'll have severe holes, deficiencies, where we're motivated by the deficiencies. But once our boat is secure, we still aren't going

anywhere unless we open up the sail and we're vulnerable to the winds. We're vulnerable to just the unknown of life. We can still go in our most purposeful direction with a spirit of exploration and love, but not knowing at any time when that wave may come crashing down, not on us, but all the boats that were all going in their own purposeful direction at the same time.

Now all of the sudden we realize we're all in the same sea together. So I think the metaphor of the sailboat works better and allows us to talk about the dialectical between security and growth or defense and growth, more so than get so stuck on this precise ordering of needs as depicted in the pyramid. What do you think? I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Dave:

Do you have to be vulnerable to grow?

Scott:

Oh, now that's a whole topic that I just am obsessed with lately. I can't believe you just asked me that.

Dave:

Well, I mean, you said that in your words, kind of. But it feels like you can grow if all you are is defending but you just grow bigger walls. So vulnerability is a really big thing. I had to learn how to consciously be vulnerable so I could be who I am today.

Scott:

Oh, this is on my mind so much right now. I can't believe that that is the sliver of what I said that you picked up on. You're an astute human.

Dave:

Thank you.

Scott:

So, I think there's become a cult of vulnerability, quite frankly, and I've been willing to push back on it lately because as I go in great detail in my book in the self-esteem chapter, there's a thing that I've been studying lately called vulnerable narcissism.

Dave:

Oh, no.

Scott:

Yeah. Yeah. I've published papers on this topic.

Dave:

Vulnerability signaling. It's like virtue signaling, is that what we're signaling here?

Scott:

What it is, is it's you think because you've suffered, that it's entitlement because you've suffered as opposed to entitlement because you think you're great. So grandiose narcissism is the kind that you normally think of when you think of narcissism.

Dave:

Like for politics.

Scott:

It's not just being like, "I'm great, but therefore I'm entitled to all special privileges because I'm the best." But we've studied this really interesting, not as well-known version flavor. It's a more introverted flavor of narcissism, more vulnerable form, where that's the kind of person, they'll lay in their bed all day and, "Why is that person succeeding and I'm not?" There's a lot of resentment.

Dave:

It's the victim mindset.

Scott:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dave:

It's, "I'm entitled because I'm a victim."

Scott:

Yeah, basically.

Dave:

Am I saying the same kind of thing? But I like that you're putting it in the "Because I've vulnerable, because I've been harmed, therefore I deserve this." Wow. I never thought of it as being a form of narcissism, but it's totally obvious when you said that.

Scott:

Yeah, I'm working on... That might be my next book actually. Yeah, I'm just fascinated with this topic.

Dave:

Please write that book. That is something that needs to exist because I have seen that now because I get to work with a lot of people in my different companies and yeah, there's a certain mindset sometimes. And it is. They behave exactly like narcissists, without self-awareness, when you're stuck in that loop, exactly the same as someone who's like, "I'm the world's best which why I can't see my own mistakes." Right?

Scott:

Wow. It's self-actualization.

Dave:

I can't wait to read that book.

Scott:

Cool, cool, cool. Well, I would be honored to come back to talk to you at any point about that in the future, but yeah, no, it's fascinating, this whole idea because I used to be fully on the Brene Brown train. I was like, "Vulnerability, yes. Sensitivity." And I wrote books on this. My book *Wired to Create* was all about how sensitivity and creativity are linked, but then I think what happens with these kinds of things is the pendulum can swing too much in a particular direction, where suddenly you're shamed if you're not being vulnerable.

Dave:

Yeah.

Scott:

And if you say anything like, "I actually feel pretty confident," you're viewed as evil.

Dave:

Yeah, or entitled or something. Right.

Scott:

There's something where things have flipped around where we don't empower people to want to have agency now. We empower people to be a victim.

Dave:

Yeah.

Scott:

Does that make sense?

Dave:

That makes a lot of sense. I'm seeing it as a major trend and the bottom line is the people I've come to respect the most, having interviewed, we're approaching almost 1,000 coming up here this year, the people who have suffered greatly and learned and stepped out of it and become leaders. In fact, it's one of the things I studied in one of my books about 500 people who had been on the show to find the commonalities of the things that they thought were most important and yeah, a lot of them really went through near death experiences, great trauma and shame and whatever else in their life, and they picked themselves up, worked their asses off, learned and don't identify with that as something that happened. It almost feels like that mindset is out of vogue right now.

Scott:

It's very out of vogue, and we don't need to go into great detail about this but I have a story. I was in special education as a kid so all these accolades and things you mention about me no one predicted. Where the heck did that come from?

Dave:

Were you in the gifted program or the other side of it?

Scott:

No, no, the opposite. Yeah, because I had an auditory disability. It was hard for me to process things in real-time when I was young.

Dave:

I had one of those, too, auditory processing.

Scott:

I'm like, "High five."

Dave:

Exactly.

Scott:

I had central auditory processing disorder is the official name of what I had, and it took me a couple of extra milliseconds just to process in real time, so they thought I was stupid. And for a while, I kept that as core to my identity. So that was like, "Hi, I'm Scott, and I was in special ed as a child." I would tell the story. Every keynote speech I would give, that's my big story, "And I want to tell everyone how I was in special ed." And then there became a point in the past couple years, where I started to rethink all this and I started to rethink narratives. I started to think the arc of my life and realized that I just don't want to keep telling that story anymore. For lots of reasons, I'd rather lead with who I am today. And it almost didn't dawn on me for many years. "You mean I'm allowed to lead with who I am right now?" It was a realization for me. It was mind blowing.

Dave:

You do have some pretty impressive credentials, to be honest. I mean, you look at all the different stuff you've worked on, different things. So, you can totally lead with that and that you're an author and teacher and professor and there's that. They do say that, though, that people who choose to study psychology usually are trying to deal with their own problems, right?

Scott:

Who says that? I never heard that before.

Dave:

Everyone who's ever talked to a psychologist. They say, "Is this what you think, Dave? No, I've had many psychologists that I've gone to see tell me that.

Scott:

What is it, research is me search? I know people say that. Really that's what did spur me to want to study intelligence and that was my original topic that I studied in my field was intelligence, like IQ testing and all that. Yeah, that definitely was me search and then I started to identify some aspects of vulnerable narcissism in my 20s. I used to think, "Wow. In my 20s, I was really horribly narcissistic. Holy cow." And just realizing some of this stuff has been just so eye opening for me and I kind of want to, not

kind of, I really want to help others identify the same patterns. I think in the self-help world, and I want to get your thoughts on this, in the self-help world, there's so much of "You are badass. You're great. Don't listen to anyone. Don't listen to haters. You're amazing," and there's not as much "Identify the narcissistic characteristics within yourself. Identify the different ways you're self-sabotaging yourself and how your self-hate and pity, instead of being reframed as 'You're awesome' might actually be hindering your growth ultimately." Do you know what I mean?

Dave:

I dare you to name What if You Actually Suck?

Scott:

That's what I'm saying. It's like, I would love to do that. That's a great title for a book. What if-

Dave:

Jen Sincero would probably come up and kick your ass. She's the author of You're a Badass. Right?

Scott:

Yeah, and I don't mean to target anyone in particular.

Dave:

No, but your point is that the rah-rah, I've seen this, too, even in the empowerment movement. It's like, and I'm not calling any particular friend out on this, but it's like, "Oh, we're going to teach you to be an expert in something or to be an influencer." It's like, "Step one, acquire something worthy of sharing that you can use with your influence." Right? And if you're going after fame, because you're supposed to or you think it's where it might... Fame sucks. It actually is a huge amount of work.

Scott:

It means more emails.

Dave:

More emails. More all kinds of pressures and yeah, you can use it to do good, but if you're just going after it just because you want to feel good about yourself, trust me. Just go to a therapist. It's way less work than trying to get well known. It's not worth it.

Scott:

It's so true. I really like you, man. I really like you. This is the first time I've ever talked to you, so I feel like I like your vibe, for whatever that's worth. Yeah, I'm just thinking because a lot of people who want to be famous, there's a fascinating phenomenon that happens. That's not really what they wanted. There was another need that was unfulfilled that they thought that would fulfill what they really wanted. And then when they eventually get what they really want, like they fall in love, for instance or they find someone who they have an intimate connection with or what other deeply unfulfilled need is really met, they suddenly don't care as much about the fame. And I think that's so interesting, such an interesting feeling. Yeah, I mean, in my book I lay out these principles of why we should strive for growth, not happiness, or strive for meaning. So meaning and happiness are two different de-sourceable

things in the psychological literature and all the research I've seen shows that happiness come for the ride of meaning.

It's like an epi-phenomenon, whereas you can be happy in the sense you report high life satisfaction or you have positive emotions but feel spiritually empty, feel deeply unfulfilled. That's why I'm really interested in basic needs and whole self-fulfillment.

Dave:

Do you think we're going to get to the point of where we can just have a survey and you fill out these 100 questions and we're going to be able to exactly know where in Kaufman's sailboat of needs you're lacking and which sail needs more rigging or whatever the right analogy is? Are we going to be able to quantify this and be like, "Oh, you're missing meaning in your life, so take this drug and it'll tell you your purpose in life"? Can we patch the holes, identify the weaknesses?

Scott:

Well, dare I say, I do have a test, a free test you could take right now and find out your self-actualization score.

Dave:

All right. Tell me, where do I go?

Scott:

Selfactualizationtests.com.

Dave:

Who would have thought? What a creative you are.

Scott:

I mean, to respond to that, I can be like, "You can actually take the test."

Dave:

That was a pretty- Hmm. We're having trouble finding that site.

Scott:

Selfactualizationtests.com.

Dave:

With an S.

Scott:

Let's try that. I'm trying this in real-time with you. Yes, with an S, and the first one, Characteristics of Self-Actualization Scale.

Dave:

Oh, it's got a picture of an orange flower. Orange is a good color. So, okay. So you actually go down there?

Scott:

So we can discuss the various tests that are-

Dave:

Oh, I see. All of those are ones you that you actually let people do right there?

Scott:

Yes. I created all these tests. And so I created the Dark of the Force. It actually can quantify whether or not you're in the light or the dark side of the Force, from the Star Wars metaphor, but actually it's scientifically validated, the light versus dark triad scale. So that might actually be more interesting to you.

Dave:

You're the biggest nerd ever. Has anyone ever told you that?

Scott:

Oh, yeah. I just wrote an article for Scientific American on that. The Science of Nerdiness is the title of it.

Dave:

Can you read my coffee mug?

Scott:

Come to the nerd side. Oh, my God, I love it. I love it. Oh, yeah. Can I take a picture of that?

Dave:

My mug says "Come to the nerd side. We have pi," and it's the character for pi.

Scott:

That is amazing.

Dave:

It just happened to be on my desk.

Scott:

I need to get that mug. I need to get that mug. No, I want to empower people to embrace their nerdy side and I think that there's a stigma when you try to have an intellectual discussion. People are like, "I feel like you're wrong." And you're like, "Well, can we discuss it from a high level, intellectual point of view?" And then they're like, "You're evil." And it's like, "Wait, what?"

Dave:

You're like, "No, I'm not because I took this." Are you on the dark side or the light side, according to your own research?"

Scott:

I'm pretty high on the light triad because the facets of the light triad are like faith in humanity. I'm a humanistic psychologist. I would be really, what's the word I'm looking for, counter and hypocritical, hypocritical if I wasn't on the light side.

Dave:

I love humanism, but most people don't know what it is. What is humanism?

Scott:

Well, so, here's the thing. I think humanistic psychology is not the same thing as humanism. Humanism could be considered a whole school of philosophical thought, but I'm talking about humanistic psychology, which has as its goal, the understanding of the whole human and what it means to live an experientially alive life, one that's full of meaning, purpose and connection with others and to kind of feel like you're at your full potential as a human. You're fully human. To me that's what I mean by I'm a humanistic psychologist. Also, you tend to have a positive view of humanity. You recognize that humans are flawed beings, but you recognize you're a flawed being, too, and you're really interested more in what unites us than divides us. So that's what I mean by humanistic psychology. But, yeah, humanism, I'm on board with humanism as well, which is more about rational thought, not exactly the same thing. It's appreciation of science, appreciation of... Have you read Steven Pinker's book [The End of Enlightenment 00:33:16]?

Dave:

Yeah.

Scott:

Yeah. I'm definitely on board with a lot of those things and I think there's a lot of overlap, for sure.

Dave:

Have you shifted your view on the world's a friendly, happy, nice place recently, given the shit show that 2020 has been?

Scott:

I really have. And it's so funny because... That's such a great question. It's such a great question. Because I have. I have days where I am like, "You know what?" I just want to impulsively tweet, "You know what? I've changed my mind. Humans suck."

Dave:

Have you changed your mind that much?

Scott:

I haven't. Here's the thing. I'm saying, I have my days. I have my moments because I'm human, because I'm human, but then this is why I haven't tweeted that because I don't believe that to be true. I believe

part of being human is having our moments, but I think I maintain my faith in humans because I'm constantly reminded of the goodness of humans when I look for it. And I think that's the point. Or when I'm not trying to bring out the worst in someone. It's very easy to see the worst in humans when you do all the things to activate someone's defense mechanisms, but it's also very easy to see the goodness when you just truly listen to someone and you're just truly present with another person and admire them for who they are on their own terms, not what you can get out of them. Then you start to have a little more faith in humanity. So that's why. So yes, I definitely, let's put it this way. This moment has made me have more of my moments, but I still maintain my faith in humanity.

Dave:

Okay, so you've managed to maintain it. Yeah, I've definitely gone through some stuff the last couple of years where I'm like, "I can't believe that anyone would do something that incredibly douche-y?" But then for me kind of the escape valve there is when I look really at the psychology of it, what people tend to do is they tend to be so unwilling to face the reality of what they're doing or what they've created that they just make up a fake world where they didn't do that and then they proceed as if that's the world that they're living in and they're just unable to see that reality. And then you realize I'm probably not going to be able to pierce that reality bubble and if I do, they're just going to feel pain and there's kind of nothing left to be done there. So that's kind of my people are basically good. If only they would see reality, they'd probably behave differently. How do you handle situations like that?

Scott:

So, so true. How do I handle situations within myself when that arises-

Dave:

Yeah. How does one do it? But I'm assuming you've studied this more than the average person.

Scott:

Well, I don't have any secret of the universe to tell you in response to that, but I do think that there are so many ways we delude ourselves and ways we erect our defense mechanisms. And these mechanisms served us when we were young because we couldn't even imagine the unbearable pain that would happen if we were rejected by that girl or, I don't know, why'd that example come up? But, that was a joke. When we're young, there's all sorts of ways in which we erect these defenses, but when we become older, we need to shed them. We need to be grounded in reality as firmly as possible if we're ever going to grow. And I'm a big believer of that. I'm a big believer of that when it comes to social movements. I've been trying to advocate the value of science.

There's some activists and they'll say things, and I'll be like, "Well, I don't think scientifically true what you're saying. Maybe your activism actually be more valuable if you built it on a solid foundation of reality." So things like that. I think that it's really important to confront reality in order to change or acceptance.

Dave:

Okay. That makes good sense. Hmm. I still don't know that I have the entire coping mechanism in place for when people completely are just living in a false reality and you're like, "Wait a minute. You say one thing. You believe what you're saying, but it doesn't match the numbers." And when that kind of thing happens, it feels, I've been talking with a bunch of other entrepreneurs about it, and you're like, "Wait a

minute." And it takes a while because people like that I don't think they're intentionally deceitful, but they tend to be very hard to spot. Are there tricks to find when you're dealing with people like that?

Scott:

I think they're easy to spot. You think they're hard to spot?

Dave:

Well, they're easy to spot after three months of looking at results from people like that. But someone who walks in and says, "I'm great at what I do."

Scott:

I see what you're saying. In a lot of ways you're asking, "How do you spot a grandiose narcissist?"

Dave:

Yeah, exactly. That's my question to a T.

Scott:

Hmm. That's funny. I wrote a whole article... Do you know who Tucker Max is?

Dave:

Yeah, he's a friend. He's also a funny guy.

Scott:

So I would say at one point we were friends and we just got out of touch, but about nine years ago or so, I was writing a cover story for Psychology Today. It was called How to Spot a Narcissist. And he was my main material. I called him up and I was like, "How do I spot a narcissist?" And so he gave me lots of really... He's a very brilliant, very smart guy, so he reverse engineered the narcissist and so it was really interesting to kind of write a lot of the stuff down. And I think that you can, in a lot of subtle ways, and you realize that there's that reality distortion machine that people talked about with Steve Jobs. You can start to pick up on that. You can look at a history. I assume if you're doing hiring, you're going to look at a person's resume and be like, "How many sort of failed experiments were there? How many times did an idea start and then it immediately flopped?" Almost everything will eventually flop. That's a whole other story, but immediately flopping.

Dave:

Right.

Scott:

So I don't know. I think there are lots of ways of spotting it and also spotting it within ourselves. I think it's continual. I don't believe in a world where there are narcissists and there are not narcissists. We all have these tendencies within ourselves and we often don't see them. We're often deluding ourselves.

Dave:

So as we were talking, I have the ability to listen and type and stuff, I just took my light dark and it says I'm Yoda. Is that-

Scott:

You were taking that test this whole time?

Dave:

Yeah, and I was listening to everything you said.

Scott:

That's amazing. So yes, Yoda is on the light side.

Dave:

I didn't know Yoda was an answer. I'm actually intrigued because it says I'm 20% better on faith in humanity than average or higher than average. I'm totally average on humanism. I totally average on Kantianism. But on the dark side, it says I'm 12.45% more narcissistic than the average.

Scott:

Yeah. No, that's great. And then what are the other two?

Dave:

I'm a little bit less psychopathic than the average and I'm 20% more Machiavellian, which totally surprises me, because I don't-

Scott:

Yeah, it makes complete sense. No, this makes... How do you get to where you are today with not at least 10 to 20% higher on narcissism and Machiavellianism? I think they're huge strengths in your specific case. I really do think you have to view these things in the whole context of the rest of the personality structure. So I would understand you as a whole and your whole personality structure.

Dave:

I'll take the rest of the tests on there. That's only one of them. And it's interesting because way back in my career, I was in my mid 20s and suddenly I'm attending senior executive leadership meetings and board meetings for a publicly traded company and I'm generally not allowed to speak, but I'm watching all this and I came out of there just shaking my head going, "These people are bat shit crazy. Nothing they do makes sense. I'm an engineer. I'm a nerd. I know how stuff works and what they're doing is pathological." And then I read 48 Laws of Power, Robert Greene's book, and I was like, "Oh, my God." It opened my eyes because they were playing by a set of hidden world stuff that I didn't know how to see and I learned how to see it from Robert Greene, and he's been on the show and I thanked him. So that was really the first time I realized how Machiavellian people were being towards me, even in a setting like that, and I think I developed some defenses, but it does surprise me that it thinks I'm more Machiavellian than average, but not particularly high either.

Scott:

Well, if this makes you feel any better, the average score is low, so it doesn't even mean you're higher than 50%. You need to think about this properly.

Dave:

It's pretty low, yeah.

Scott:

It doesn't mean you're high in Machiavellianism. Do you know what I mean? That's not what that score means. Yeah. It like if the average is two and you're 2.4, you're still low on Machiavellianism.

Dave:

Okay, I've already planned my next whole keynote speech thing. It's going to be like, "I thought I was a good person and then I did this Kaufman sailboat test thing and now it wounded my soul. And now I'm entitled to be treated with extra respect." Thank you, man. You've empowered me.

Scott:

I've empowered you for special privileges. That's hilarious, because you found out you're entitled because your narcissism score is high. Well, you got the Yoda. It's amazing, the psychology of you and what you focused on with that test result. Yoda is what you got. So what Yoda does is assesses the totality of your wholeness and then gives you the result, which is not one specific facet of you.

Dave:

Wow. That was a massive piece of psychological ninjary. Is that a word? Ninjary.

Scott:

I like it. I like it.

Dave:

Tell me more about Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. We talked about the main one, but what about the transcendent part of it? Give that to me in a nutshell. I'm really intrigued at that.

Scott:

He had this theory. He had this theory Z. So McGregor, Douglas McGregor, was an organizational psychologist in the 60s, 70s. Argued that there's a Theory X and Theory Y. This was a management theory, that managers who hold a Theory X in their workplace tend to be very carrot stick, reward oriented. Those who hold a Theory Y idea in the workplace, workers are motivated intrinsically. They just enjoy what they're doing. But Maslow's like, "I think there's a Theory Z, something higher where you then distinguish between non-transcending self-actualizers and transcending self-actualizers. He called them the transcendents and he tried to work at the characteristics of the transcendents. And he's like, "You can be a non-transcending self-actualizer. You can go to your nine to five job. You're a great coder. You have your workday and you figured out all the bugs in the code and you go home and go to sleep." I don't know. That was probably a terrible example and I just upset and pissed off coders for not including them in the class of transcending self-actualizers, but the point I'm trying to make here before I get in trouble-

Dave:

Only the ones who do LSD when they code. They're different.

Scott:

If you do the LSD while you're coding, now you're a transcender. Yes.

Dave:

There you go.

Scott:

That's right. That's right. Well, the difference between non-self-actualizing and transcendents, you enjoy your job. You feel good about it and you feel like you're fulfilling your potential, but you just don't care at all about helping to fulfill the potential of society. [crosstalk 00:46:23]

Dave:

There's a tribe of people out there, and I know because I'm one of them and I connect with others like that, who actually give a lot of shits about that. That's a focus for them. There's other people, it's just not what they're here to do.

Scott:

They're not.

Dave:

I never thought of it that way. But you just kind of shined a flashlight on that for me. That's cool.

Scott:

Well, I want to give all the credit to Maslow for that. He blew my mind when I read about... I mean I really read it in his journal articles. This was stuff that wasn't even published. He has a journal entry. I read the two volume set you can buy at Amazon, but I think I'm the only who ever bought it and or read it. But that two volume, his personal diaries and there's one entry in the middle of it where he says, "New insight today. I think there's two types of self-actualizing." I was like, "Holy shit."

Dave:

Wow. Just buried in there.

Scott:

I was like, "This is good shit. Is anyone else seeing this?"

Dave:

But it's actually a really powerful technique to go back to what our elders learned and learn from them. And there's just so much there that we can pick up and kind of stand on the shoulders of giants. I mean, a lot of the biohacking stuff, especially when you get into the weird states, [a guy 00:47:38] knew about that in the 13th century from meditating in caves for a while. And probably the guy who's most an example of that is Dan Brown, where basically the father of attachment theory, but also, "Oh, yeah, let

me go translate this Sanskrit text" in the same human being. That just blew my mind when I got to talk to him. But you also talk about attachment in your book. What is the role of attachment and other things there when it comes to this new transcending level of Maslow's hierarchy?

Scott:

Sure. Attachment I put in the boat itself. It's not part of the sail. It's part of our security. It's part of our grounding. We feel like we have a safe base that we can return to in times of need and that we trust that safe base. So if our attachment style is insecure, we don't trust our protectors very much and I think we can be insecurely attached to our environment, not just our caregivers like parents, but I also think we can live in a very distrustful environment where we don't trust anybody around us and we're cynical about everything. Now what I'm really fearing is that this is what America has become, but that's a whole other conversation.

Dave:

Become cynical, is that what you're saying?

Scott:

Yeah, we've become a nation of we're all distrustful with each other. Everyone has an ulterior motive or a different intention. Now everything is virtue signaling. Everything has some sort of alternative, more nefarious reason than what people are doing. And I think that that's very interesting to me and I think it's the same analogy. We don't trust our protector, our President of the United States. We don't really tend to feel as though or there's just the virus. We can just go the virus level if you don't want to go to the more controversial political level, but we're very fearful now.

Dave:

I'm wondering how the virus is going to vote, so I know that I should trust it or not.

Scott:

Yeah.

Dave:

I don't know how you can politicize a virus.

Scott:

That's why I was like, "Stick to the virus, Scott. Stick to the virus, Scott." Don't want to piss off the Trump supporters. But yeah, I feel like a lot of people in this country, I think it's a fact, whether or not whatever you're a fan of politically, there's a lot of distrust in our leaders right now.

Dave:

How would someone listening to this who's just feeling triggered as all hell? They're triggered if they see someone driving with or without a mask in a car because both sides of that are triggering. Or triggered around politics. I mean, it's election time and all that. Is there a way to turn off the triggering so you can take a deep breath and look at the facts and just not be emotional about it?

Scott:

That's a tricky one, my friend, because I'm going to do one of these on the one hand and the other hand. This is how I feel about that question. On the one hand, the caring hat that thinks, "I don't want to ever get to the point where I'm no longer emotionally affected by real injustices in the world. I never want to become the person who no longer feels or cares about the suffering of others." Okay. So that's the one hand. There's another hand that says, "Well, while we can hold that to be true, I think we can also hold to be true at the same time that I also don't want to be the one that's ruled by those feelings. I don't want to be the type of person that has no choice at all in whether or not I let that affect me and cloud my scene of reality." So I think that we just need to not go so much in the opposite direction where we no longer are outraged by anything that is important to be outraged, because Erich Fromm, the humanistic psychologist said, "To be sane in an insane society is the highest marker of insanity," so I don't ever want to get over there, but at the same time I do think with meditation practices, with certain spiritual practices of even just philosophy.

I'm very into Buddhist philosophy and the notion of non-attachment in Buddhist philosophy is very much in line with secure attachment in the psychological literature. So that's an interesting connection.

Dave:

Wow. That's actually some profound stuff right there because-

Scott:

Yeah, yeah.

Dave:

So non-attachment equals secure attachment?

Scott:

Yeah. With the way Buddhists, I'm very into Buddhist philosophy-

Dave:

Yeah, me, too.

Scott:

Yeah, I got the sense you are, too, by the way. But yeah, so the whole notion of non-attachment is really about being so secure in yourself and the world that you aren't so influenced. You do have the separation between stimulus and response. You're not so reactive and anxious and fearful about everything.

Dave:

To get to that state, do you need to be kind of high up in Maslow's hierarchy, like "I'm safe. I'm secure. I have enough food. I have enough money. No one's going to break down my door?"

Scott:

You're obviously not attached. You're obviously not. But by the way, I thought you were just going to stop with after high, the word high. Do you need to be high?

Dave:

I though your answer was going to be cannabis to that question, what does it take to be non-reactive?

Scott:

I would have answered that, if you had just stopped and put a period after the word high, but I think that that's a myth because I do get sometimes from various people who are well-meaning, they're very into the social justice world and they're fighting good causes, but they'll say things like, "Scott, you can't even begin to study what you're studying until we've cured everything in the world, all discrimination is gone." And the thing I think it's a false dichotomy.

Dave:

That's just a state of helplessness.

Scott:

Yeah, well, I agree.

Dave:

The same thing, well, you can't think about moving to a moon colony or to Mars or something until you fix everything on the planet.

Scott:

Fix everything on the planet, yeah, yeah.

Dave:

When someone hits that point of transcendence that was in Maslow's hidden or unfinished work, how different from enlightenment is that? The Buddhist concept of enlightenment?

Scott:

Yeah, I mean, I have, in my chapter on transcendence, sorry, I think it's called peak experiences, I have a whole chart I tried to amass throughout the ages different terms and labels that different philosophical systems have used to talk about the same darn thing. I think it's the same thing. I mean what Maslow was talking about trying to get to in his Theory Z worldview, there's a whole Theory Z worldview of wisdom and insight into the human condition and into oneself, I think is very much in line with 78 other terms that people have used. Some terms I'd never heard of them before, like love-fire. Have you heard of that?

Dave:

No. Where's that from?

Scott:

I don't know. [crosstalk 00:54:48] I'd have to look up the source.

Dave:

That was really dark.

Scott:

You're funny. I'd have to look up the source, but there are all sorts of labels and terms and I never heard of that one for that, but yeah, I think, scientifically, I think that there's a minimum number of actual phenomenon underlining a massive amount of different words and labels. And every now and then, you'll get some person who's a good marketer will come up with their own new term for something which is the same darn phenomenon that has been studied for millions of years, but this amazing marketer is able to put some word on it that like, "Oh, that's [fukabukaya 00:55:30]. He's right." And it's like, "No, actually a lot of other people have talked about that."

Dave:

Personal development, pretty much everything that's said by modern just epic personal development people pretty much exists in some 14th century text somewhere on the planet. We've been studying this for a long time. We just keep forgetting that we've been studying it.

Scott:

It's true. It's true. That's why I think it's so important, the wisdom of our elders. This book, I couldn't have done it without Maslow and I consider him a dear friend I never met.

Dave:

Hearing that, okay, I'm just blanking on his name. Napoleon Hill, Think and Grow Rich. He talks about cultivating a master mind, not the kind of the master mind that we're all members of these days, but a virtual master mind in his head. So he'd sit and recreate Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin and whoever his other heroes were to the point where they almost became real and he'd have conversations and ask them what they'd think and taught people how to do that, so you've instantiated, you've created a virtual machine of Maslow in your head that you can consult it sounds like, which is kind of cool.

Scott:

I really did. I feel like I know exactly what he would say about everything.

Dave:

Yeah, well, you start into that level, which is actually, in and of itself, a pretty unique thing to do. It's cool.

Scott:

If I was that good at stalking in real life, but I'm not. Calm down.

Dave:

It's a lot of work to stalk in real life. You have to go places and take pictures and stuff.

Scott:

Yeah. Thanks for taking that as a joke.

Dave:

In your book, you talk about practical tips for how to use the knowledge, which also I really appreciate as a fellow author. Taking academics and saying, "Now here's what to do," is a great act of service for readers and I want you to share in this interview some of the practical tips, some of the exercises that you have in the book that you think are the most useful.

Scott:

Yeah, we have a whole set of growth challenges. Actually I put up an online course I'm doing surrounding the book where we have people really go through these exercises and discuss them with each other and what it was like for them. I call them growth challenges. These aren't necessarily things that are going to make you happy. Again we're going through the difference between happiness and growth, but they're things that will help you grow. They really will. They'll help you get outside your comfort zone. So exploring your dark side is a really important one where you really sit with your whole being and try to even think about, "How can I reframe this artificial distinction between positive and negative emotions? Maybe we just have comfortable and uncomfortable emotions. Could these uncomfortable emotions serve my growth? And in what ways could they?" There's a whole sort of growth challenges to help you make connections and have high quality connections with others. There's different listening techniques. There's something called active constructive responding technique. There are actually things you can learn to be a darn good listener. Carl Rogers, the humanistic psychotherapist, called it active listening, asking good follow-up questions and really showing that you comprehend what the other person's saying. You're quite good at that, for what it's worth.

Dave:

Thank you.

Scott:

Yeah, there's a lot of growth challenges, trying to seek out and try to just live more in the B-realm of human existence. Maslow called it the B-realm, where you seek out the beauty, you seek out the meaning. Actually sometimes you can't just accept and just assume that, "Oh, well, my life sucks so therefore everything sucks here around me." Then there's no point in having agency. Don't ever lose that, that there's no point in having agency. Don't lose that. Try to seek out the B-realm as much as you can. Try going on a virtual, you're feeling down, you're like, "I need beauty in my life right now." Try to seek out like, hopefully you have a computer and you have a virtual tour of a museum or something. Or go out in nature as much as you can or if you have a friend who's always nagging, be like, "Look, I love you, but I need a pause here," and then call up your friend who makes you feel alive.

Dave:

Thank you for writing a cool book, actually writing a whole bunch of cool books. I'm going to have to do all your other online tests so I can be more judgmental of myself. I'm really looking forward to all of the self-flagellation that will follow. It's going to make me a better person, I know it.

Scott:

I expect good results. I'm being more positive here.

Dave:

I'm just messing with you.

Scott:

I know you are. I know.

Dave:

I actually really think that there is great value-

Scott:

But I'm literal.

Dave:

You're literal, too.

Scott:

It's who I am.

Dave:

But there's great value and we should actually name that URL again. I have it in one of these windows here. Well, your main website is [scottbarrykaufman.com](http://scottbarrykaufman.com) and it's on there, right?

Scott:

Yeah, that's right. Everything's there. Yep.

Dave:

And the name of your book is Transcend. And this has been a longer interview. It's been a longer interview. It's been a lot of fun for me. Hopefully it was fascinating for all of our listeners. If you guys like this, there's stuff in Scott's book that is not commonplace and worthy of consideration. So this is a book that's actionable, but it's also just an interesting read to just think about it. So thanks for taking the time to write it.

Scott:

Thank you so much for saying that and for having me on the show. It's so much fun talking to you.

Dave:

If you guys like the show, you know what to do. Read the book and if you're ordering that book and you happen to go to [fastthisway.com](http://fastthisway.com) or order my new book, Fast This Way, that's not even out yet, then what'll happen is every time is people order Fast This Way, they'll see Scott's awesome book showing up right next to it on Amazon. And as always, if you read a book, you are required by state law now to actually leave a review for the author. Because if you don't leave a review for the author, you're a bad person and you're 100% narcissist, Machiavellian, evil on the scale. Am I right, Scott?

Scott:

It has to be five stars, though. That's the rule.

Dave:

A five star rating, of course, of course. All right, guys, I'll see you on the next episode.