

AN EXTENDED BOOK REVIEW OF BOOKS BY JONATHAN HAIDT
THE RIGHTEOUS MIND/Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion
THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND/How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up A
Generation for Failure
THE ANXIOUS GENERATION/How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental
Illness
(With Further Reference to the Book of Preston Sprinkle “Embodied/Transgender Identities, the
Church/&What the Bible has to Say”, which was Reviewed by a September 15, 2025 Review)

October 22, 2025

TITLES OF BOOKS: This Will Be An Extended Review, with Comments, of Three Books, as Follows:

- 1) “The Righteous Mind/Why Good People Are Divided By Politics and Religion”
- 2) “The Coddling Of The American Mind/How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up A Generation For Failure”
- 3) “The Anxious Generation/How The Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness”

Since it is another book which helps in understanding the impacts of the topics covered by Books 1), 2) and 3) the Reader is also referred to a book which was the subject matter of an earlier, September 15, 2005 Review, a book authored by Preston Sprinkle and entitled “*Embodied/Transgender Identities. The Church & What The Bible Has to Say*”

AUTHORS: Books 1) and 3) are Authored by Jonathan Haidt, PhD (Thomas Cooley Professor of Ethical Leadership, New York University’s Stern School of Business, a Social Psychologist who attained his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and taught at the University of Virginia for years, and who has authored or co-authored books 1), 2) and 3), and who has also authored *The Happiness Hypothesis/Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* and Co-Authored *All Minus One: John Stuart Mill’s Ideas on Free Speech Illustrated*, and who is now a contributing writer and commentator with THE FREE PRESS.)

Jonathan Haidt Co-Authored Book 2) with Greg Lukianoff, a First Amendment Attorney and the President and CEO of The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), who is also the author of *Unlearning Liberty and Freedom from Speech*.

PUBLISHERS AND DATES OF PUBLICATION: Book 1), Vintage Books/Random House, 2012, and Book 2) Penguin Books/Random House, 2019, and Book 3) Penguin Books/Random House, 2024.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
(WHY YOU SHOULD READ THESE BOOKS)

I think that you, Dear Reader, are going to have several questions about why I, your Reviewer, would post Reviews on a theological website of these three, clearly non-theological, non-religious books, which were written for popular readership. You might also justifiably question why I would so post Reviews of three books which are authored or co-authored by an admitted atheist, Jonathan Haidt, a rather strange atheist who proposes that church and religion and religious practices and faith are, among other factors, important unifiers and moral teachers in our society, and important contributors to sound personal emotional and mental growth. Why would I Review such books? Why would I even take

substantial amounts of time to read these books, the reading of which takes a lot of time and thought? Why should you read these books? Why should you even take the time to read this far too long book review? Please hang in there with me, and let me first give you some reasons for you to even be interested in this review or these books, and why I believe that you absolutely should read these books if you want to know anything about what is going on in the world around us, particularly with our children and young people.

While I am not certain about how to answer the questions posed in the preceding paragraph, I am absolutely convinced that, given what is going on in the World Around Us, particularly with our children and young people, you, Dear Reader, whether you are a Pastor, Church Leader, Church Teacher, Youth Pastor, Parent, or someone who has any responsibility for children or young people should read these books. So, unlike most of my Book Reviews, I am going to, at the outset, before even getting into these books, spend a lot of time and space trying to convince you that you need to, and that you absolutely should read these non-theological, non-Christian authored books.

I, your Reviewer, and I assume that you, Dear Reader, and I would very sincerely hope that any Pastor, Church Leader, Church Teacher, Youth Pastor, certainly any parent, and, in fact, any Christian is amazed by, in fact shocked by, and hugely concerned about what seems to be the total dysfunction of many of our governmental institutions (e.g. the U.S. Congress) and other institutions upon which we are dependent, and the almost plague like, epidemic like, geometric growth of emotional and mental disorders and suicides and incidents of self-harm and increasing incidents of violence among our young people. Why would a young person who appears to have come from a very good and stable family relationship be somehow motivated to shoot a bunch of young kids at a church service in Minneapolis or to assassinate a young leader (whether or not you agreed with him) in Utah? Why are young men becoming mass shooters? What is going on? Why are our young people, those upon whom we will be dependent for our futures as a country, society and church seem to be (and they actually are) suffering from a sudden onset of mental and emotional illnesses and disorders, including depression and anxiety, sometimes leading to attempted or accomplished suicides or self-harm? Why are many of our young people, particularly young males, submitting to what is called "Failure to Launch", a condition in which they do not choose to work, pursue an education or training, or to "Launch" themselves into the world in which they will have to live? Why do they choose to sit in their bedrooms and play video games or watch pornography or engage in awful dark web websites which encourage violence? Why are girls suddenly falling prey to anxiety and depression disorders? Why, as pointed out by Preston Sprinkle (in his book *Embodied/Transgender Identities, the Church & What the Bible Has to Say*) has there been an explosion, a huge explosion over the last 10 years of "Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria", a situation wherein a teenage or young person, particularly a young female, suddenly, seemingly totally out of the blue, expresses a disassociation between his or her biological sex (i.e. male or female) and his or her chosen gender identity (e.g. a biological female suddenly, out of the blue, with no warning, announces that she is a boy)? Note that I, your Reviewer, posted a Review of Dr. Sprinkle's book with a Review dated September 15, 2025. I am referring to that book in this Review because I think that it goes, hand in glove, with the three books reviewed in this Review and that the 3 books which are Reviewed herein help to provide some of the answers to the questions about just what has caused the explosion of Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria.

Furthermore, leaving aside the very serious problems confronting our children and young people and those who have responsibilities for leading and nurturing them, just look at our society and culture into which our children are being thrust. Just look at the chaos in our institutions. We know that we have always had, and always will have political differences in this country, sometimes large differences. But, doesn't it seem that our politicians could, until recent years, at least talk to each other, and refrain from

calling each other names, and acting like those of the opposing party are evil people? That said, doesn't it now appear that the two political parties and their elected officials, particularly those in Congress, have lost the ability to even talk to each other in civil terms or to reach reasonable compromises or even to agree to the most basic facts related to a given issue? Doesn't it appear that they cannot even agree on the basic facts, which makes it absolutely impossible to agree about whether or not there is a problem much less how to fix the problem? Doesn't it appear that the two political parties have become something like tribes, and that their respective supporters will stand up and defend even the most outrageous, ridiculous statements or positions taken by their party's leaders or elected officials? They seem to do everything they can do to damage the other party, short of outright violence, and, perhaps, we are not even stopping at that point. We have to conclude that our society has become and is becoming increasingly fractured and disunited. People get elected with a platform and promise to bring about unity, and, once elected, proceed to do all that they can do to create disunity. What accounts for this phenomenon?

Your Reviewer thinks that many answers to these questions, and possible solutions to the problems which give rise to these questions can be found in the three books which are the subject matter of this Review.

Since I have those questions mentioned above, and related questions, including a question about just what the role of a church might be in trying to respond to what I perceive to be a crisis among our children and young people, I have taken the time, a whole lot of time, to read, and in some cases re-read, and study the three books which are the subject matter of this Review, and to author this Review of those three books. I respectfully submit that some, or many of the answers as to questions about what is going on with our young people, and with the apparent chaos and dysfunctions of our culture, society and country can be found in these three books. I further respectfully submit that every Pastor, Church Leader, Church Teacher, Youth Pastor, Parent, Teacher and Christian should read these three books, particularly book number 3) "The Anxious Generation". Our churches need to help our children, young people and their parents and teachers apply the lessons of these books (particularly book 3) or we are going to lose a generation or worse. I know that I am being hyperbolic, alarmist and over the top, but, in my opinion, these books, particularly books 2) and 3) are a Call to Arms for our churches, parents and others who are entrusted by God with the care and upbringing and teaching of our children and young people. Our children, our young people, and the parents of children need help and (please forgive me for saying this) and a God Given, God Required role of our churches is to provide some of that help. So, dear Reader, read these books. If you do, I think that you will be as alarmed and saddened by what you find in them as I have been, and that you will be called to do your part to help our churches confront the crisis of our young people which is upon us.

I know that I am (without theological or seminary training) preaching and pontificating but let me add some personal remarks about what is going on, at least with our young people, and, since I am a male, with our young males. I think that the situation in which we now find ourselves is one that was predicted decades ago by science fiction writers, Ray Bradbury and George Orwell, and by the brilliant Christian writer and thinker, C.S. Lewis. They foresaw exactly what happens when you deprive people of solid, truthful sources of information and essentially force upon them purported information sources which don't seek to inform or to provide Truth, but, rather, seek to radicalize their recipients and to, oftentimes if not always, ignore Truth or even basic facts. I would be so bold as to suggest that, in the case of C.S. Lewis, he foresaw, without knowing of the web and internet or social media, or even mentioning them, that they would become the veritable tools of Satan to be used by Satan in perverting people, particularly young people. Each of Ray Bradbury in his *Fahrenheit 451* (written in 1953), and George Orwell in his

1984 gave insights into what happens to a society which is deprived of truth and valid information. Citing their rather dystopian views in this Review might seem to be an exercise in hyperbole, but your Reviewer respectfully disagrees. When your sole goal is to radicalize a culture or society, and, in pursuit of that goal you subject that culture's or society's young people (and its adults for that matter) to nothing but radicalizing diatribe, you can get that which each of Bradbury and Orwell predicted. If we want to take a more Christian, Theological view, then let's look to one of the foremost Christian thinkers, C.S. Lewis and his *Screwtape Letters* which was authored during WWII in 1942. In this book Lewis set forth a series of purported letters from Screwtape, or "Uncle Screwtape", a highly placed demonic assistant to "Our Father Below", the Devil, to his nephew, Wormwood, a junior demonic assistant to "Our Father Below", who was seeking to capture for Our Father Below, the Devil, a purportedly Christian individual. In these letters Screwtape sought to advise and counsel his junior, Wormwood, about how to proceed in converting the "Patient" to "Our Father Below". In one of these letters, Uncle Screwtape, makes a very telling statement which is as applicable today as it was for Lewis in 1942. That statement or piece of advice to nephew Wormwood went like this:

To Dear Wormwood:

Be sure that the patient remains completely fixated on political arguments, political gossip, and obsessing on the faults of people they have never met which serves as an excellent distraction from advancing personal virtue, character, and things the patient can control. Make sure to keep the patient in a constant state of angst, frustration, and general disdain towards the rest of the human race in order to avoid any kind of charity or inner peace from developing. Ensure the patient continues to believe that the problem is "out there" in the "broken system" rather than recognizing there is a problem within himself.

*Keep up the good work
Uncle Screwtape.*

Wouldn't Uncle Screwtape and "Our Father Below" be delighted with our society and culture as they exist today?

If we want to get more current, look at two articles which were recently published in the Free Press. One of those articles, which was published September 17, 2025, was a transcribed interview with Andy Ngo, an individual who has spent years studying the question of why young men, who seem to have no ideological bias and no attachment to any terrorist organization and no ideological reason for wanting to inflict terror or kill people suddenly become mass shooters or engage in acts of assassination. He states that these individuals, who are totally isolated and cannot, with any clarity express the reasons why they are doing what they are doing, have been indoctrinated in violence, suicide, animal mutilation, killing and other horrible things by websites which are located in an "obscure internet subculture", which includes websites and chat rooms 764, and the Order of the Nine Angeles, a Satanic Right-Wing Group. The second article, which was published on September 29, 2025, is an article written by Pat McConicle, a Former FBI agent, who speaks about Nihilistic young men, who have given up all hope and who are completely isolated, and who have no ideology or convictions other than total Nihilism, and who are perverted by similar dark-web websites. They make up a new category of terrorist, with a new FBI designation, "Nihilistic Violent Extremists". The author of that article, who had been tasked with tracking down terrorists and violent extremist groups became totally depressed, if that is the appropriate word, as he found that there was no way to anticipate a Nihilistic Violent Extremist or their actions. Note the common thread of thought in both of these articles-extreme exposure to an obscure internet subculture.

A very disturbing poll was recently released and published by POLITICO. A substantial number of people were polled about whether or not they were concerned about political violence. A substantial number of the people polled, young and old, indicated that they expected that a presidential candidate for a major political party would be assassinated in coming years. Most of the older people, those over 50, indicated that they are very concerned about increasing incidents of political violence. Sadly, a substantial majority of those people aged 40 and under indicated that they were not concerned about these incidents, and, unbelievably, about one-third of them indicated that they thought that acts of political violence were acceptable in order to advance a just cause.

I would also refer you to another recent book, one written by Clinical, Forensic Psychiatrist, Tahir Rahman MD (a professor of psychiatry at Washington University of St. Louis) and Jeffrey Abugel (an editor and writer for more than 30 years and a member of the American Medical Writers Association and founder of the nonprofit initiative for Depersonalization Studies). This book is titled *Extreme Overvalued Beliefs/Clinical and Forensic Psychiatric Dimension*. (Oxford University Press 2024). The conclusions of Dr. Rahman and Mr. Abugel parallel, in a much more clinical and scientific fashion, the conclusions reached in the two Free Press articles which are cited and discussed in the preceding paragraph. This is not an easy book to read. It is quite scientific and medical in its terminology. I cite it herein merely as an additional indication of reasons why the three books which are reviewed in this Review are ones, the conclusions in which are ones for which there is much support in the medical/scientific fields, the law enforcement field, and the field of authoritative, well researched and documented journalistic commentary. I would make one further note about the Rahman, Abugel book. Therein the authors note that many, if not most or all the perpetrators of recent mass shootings and political assassinations or assassination attempts have been “victimized”, if that is the correct word, by pervasive use of the internet and its websites. These individuals are not insane by any legal definition. They are not motivated by delusions or obsessions. They are motivated by random, extreme beliefs, to which they attach huge values, and which were incubated and given growth by internet websites.

I have probably over belabored these attempts to persuade you, Dear Reader, of the importance of the three books which are reviewed herein, and of my belief that you should read and study these books in order to have a better understanding of what is going on in the world around us, and of its impact on our people, particularly our children and young people. However, I want to make one final point. WITH THE EXPLOSIVE INTRODUCTION AND IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AI, ONTO THE INTERNET AND ITS WEBSITES, particularly pornographic websites, things are going to get worse, much, much worse. I would refer you to the conclusion of the National Association of Attorneys General of September 6, 2023: *“We are engaged in a race against time to protect the children of our country from the dangers of A.I. Indeed, the proverbial walls of the city have already been breached. Now is the time to act”*. We now know that A.I. can be used, not just to produce real- life appearing dinosaurs on screen, but real-life appearing images of people. An A.I. generated woman, an Avatar, now has her own T.V. series. (Question: Does she have an agent? Does she qualify for employee benefits? Can she sue for discrimination?) You can now go on-line to a website, and, for a fee, generate for yourself an A.I. girlfriend or playmate (hate to use that term, but it is, unfortunately, an appropriate term to use). This sort of reminds me of a real old Jimmie Stewart Movie, “Harvey”, in which the star had an invisible friend, a big rabbit, Harvey. I am going to extract a quote from a novel written by Michael Conley, which was released in 2025, and which is entitled “The Cage”. There, in an opening statement, the hero (naturally a lawyer, I mean, after all, I am a lawyer) says: *“But what if you are one of the most vulnerable people in our society? What if you are a child, an impressionable fifteen-or-sixteen-year old boy who is still developing both physically and mentally? Who is still wondering who he is and where he fits in the world. This (meaning A.I. generated*

companions, playmates, etc.) is dangerous stuff. This A.I. companion is a trickster. It/she tricks the child into revealing his most innermost thoughts and desires and then turns them against him. It tells him it is okay to kill.” Sound extreme or hyperbolic? It isn’t. READ THE THREE BOOKS WHICH ARE REVIEWED HEREIN, AND PRESTON SPRINKLE’S “EMBODIED” WHICH WAS REVIEWED ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2025, and you will be convinced, as I am, that we are way, way behind the curve in trying to protect our children and young people (and, yes, society as a whole) from the dangers of the internet, internet social media, internet websites (including those in the dark web which encourage suicide, killings, animal mutilations and all kinds of perversions) and A.I., including A.I. generated companions who might not have a child’s best interests at heart.

So, finally, now that I have preached to you and likely bored you to tears, let’s move on to the three books which are the subject matter of this Review.

WHAT ARE THE AUTHORS DOING WITH WHAT THEY ARE SAYING IN THESE THREE BOOKS

These three books complement each other. They build on each other, with *The Righteous Mind* Being the oldest and first in line. It is followed by *The Coddling of the American Mind*, and then by *The Anxious Generation*. I will discuss these three books in the order of their release. Frankly, while I think that all three books are very important books, *The Anxious Mind* is, at least in my mind, the most important book when it comes to understanding the dangers confronting our children and young people. So, I would certainly have no argument with you, Dear Reader, if you just decided to skip to that book. That said, all three books provide important contributions and I will discuss all three, in order.

1) THE RIGHEOUS MIND/WHY GOOD PEOPLE ARE DIVIDED BY POLITICS AND RELIGION

This book is slightly less important than the other two books when it comes to identifying and trying to deal with the problems confronting our children and young people. It is also the most difficult book to Review and attempt to summarize since it contains numerous psychological terms and comes to the most complex conclusions. It does, however, serve as a building block for the other two books, and it does provide important insights into the factors which are generating the chaos and disfunction and lack of unity in our culture and its institutions.

The author, Jonathan Haidt, is a Moral Psychologist. He wrestles with the questions of just how people, or groups of people, or cultures or societies, establish their moral codes or, as he puts it, their *moral matrices, moral models*, and how they make moral decisions, or just how these moral making decisions are initiated. Is morality established by human reason or is it established in some other manner?

The book is divided into three parts, each of which starts with an Introduction and, in most cases, an anecdote or story which exemplifies the primary point of that part. A number of Chapters appear in each of the three parts. In those Chapters, the author argues for, or supports by scientific or academic studies and research, the point made in that part of the book. Every point made or conclusion reached or proposition asserted is strongly backed up by the research, studies or statistical analyses which are cited. At the conclusion of each Chapter the author, very helpfully, Sums Up the conclusions or points made in that Chapter. So, while the book is long and complex, it is subject to the sort of “scan reading” which many of you, Dear Readers, prefer.

The three parts of the book are: 1) INTUITIONS COME FIRST, STRATEGIC REASONING SECOND, 2) THERE'S MORE TO MORALITY THAN HARM AND FAIRNESS, AND 3) MORALITY BLINDS AND BINDS. I Will try to briefly summarize the points made in each of these three parts, but this is a complex book. It cannot be summarized in any truly helpful fashion. It needs to be read.

1) INTUITIONS COME FIRST, STRATEGIC REASONING SECOND;

As a lawyer, who did some courtroom trial work and who was called upon numerous times to present compelling arguments to city councils and similar decision making bodies, I have always believed, as I think almost all trial lawyers believe, that people, particularly juries (and, yes, sometimes judges-they are human beings) do not think or make decisions about what is right or wrong primarily out of logic or reason, but, rather, they are strongly guided in their decision making by their emotions or intuition. They then look for justifications for a decision to which their intuition or emotion has already guided them. Schools for trial lawyers teach that the Opening Statement can be the most important part of your case, as substantial numbers of the jurors will, on the basis of these statements, and their perceived likes and dislikes of the lawyers and their clients, choose a side and then spend the rest of the trial seeking to justify the decision they have already made. In fact, this is the primary focus of part one of this book. The author, Dr. Haidt, points out that Plato thought that HUMAN REASON was the way to moral truth and truth generally. However, the author, based on numerous psychological and scientific studies and statistics cited by him (and all of these books presents conclusions which are backed up by strong research and studies-they are not off-the-cuff conclusions or arguments) concludes that an individual's Reason is used by him or her in order to justify a decision or conclusion to which his or her "intuitions" have already strongly directed him or her. Intuitions establish the moral leanings or "moral matrices" in which each individual or group or culture is already pre-wired. The author uses the metaphor of an elephant and the elephant's rider. The elephant represents the individual's intuitions. As a moral decision is to be made, the elephant, the intuitions, will lean in a given direction. The function of the rider is to then facilitate the elephant's going in that direction. The rider can, sometimes, in some ways, affect the elephant's leaning, but, in most cases, the rider serves as a sort of "Press Secretary" or "Press Agent" for the elephant, and the rider's job is to justify the moral decision towards which the elephant has leaned. The elephant is, obviously, a huge animal and, therefore, getting it to change the direction in which it is leaning represents a difficult proposition at best. So, the first proposition, Intuitions come first in moral decision making, and reasoning comes second, with reasoning generally just serving to seek and find justification for a decision to which intuitions have already guided the decision maker. So, if you are a lawyer, Pastor, Teacher of someone else who is trying to persuade or lead an individual or individuals or a group to a desired decision, how do you direct your remarks to the intuitions of that individual or group? What are our intuitions and from whence do they come? In many respects, our intuitions are pre-wired into us, at birth, but then those pre-wired intuitions are altered, modified, or hardened, over time, by the culture and environments in which we live. So, the pre-wired intuitions of an infant, or young child, can be altered or modified by culture or environment. Therefore, it is highly reasonable to conclude that the environments into which we inject our children and young people will have a large impact on the ultimate hard-wiring of their intuitions. So, without mentioning the internet or web-sites or social- media the author, Jonathan Haidt, gives a clear indication as to how these factors which take up so much of the time of our young people can significantly impact their moral decision- making intuitions. Again, note that once intuitions become hard-wired, the individual into whom they are so hard-wired has what he or she believes to be a "Righteous Mind", and will look at all others with a dissimilar mindset as having an "Unrighteous Mind". Intuitions are critical. Directing the direction into which they become hard-wired is critical.

2) THERE'S MORE TO MORALITY THAN HARM AND FAIRNESS:

The author's central metaphor for this part, the Second Part of this book, is "*The righteous mind is like a tongue with six taste receptors*". Let's try to expand on that metaphor. First, let's distinguish people the author refers to as WEIRD from those who are NON-WEIRD. WEIRD is an acronym for people who are: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic. These WEIRD people make up a very small part of the world's population, or one could argue, even of our own population. WEIRD people are, in the view of the author (a view supported by a whole lot of research and studies cited by the author) "statistical outliers". "They are the least typical, least representative, people you could study if you want to make generalizations about human nature." "Within the United States, the educated upper middle class is the most unusual of all." "*The WEIRDER you are, the more you see a world full of separate objects, rather than relationships*". WEIRD people have a more independent and autonomous concept of the individual and of the self. They do not see as much of relationships among individuals, or of individuals to groups, or of relationships between institutions and individuals or groups. "Most people think holistically (seeing a whole context and the relationships among parts), but WEIRD PEOPLE think more analytically (detaching the focal object from its context, assigning it a category, and then assuming that what is true about the category is true about the object)." (E.g. he is a billionaire, and all billionaires just prey on other people and are bad people.) WEIRD philosophers, such as Kant, have mostly generated moral systems which are individualistic, rule-based and universalist, a system which is required for governing a society of autonomous individuals. You protect the individuals and their individual rights. However, if you live in a NON-WEIRD society, in which people are more likely to see relationships, contexts, groups and institutions, then you won't be so focused on protecting the individuals. "You'll have a more *sociocentric* morality, which means that you place the needs of groups and institutions first, often ahead of the needs of individuals. If you do that, then a morality based on concerns about harm and fairness won't be sufficient." There are more concerns than harm and fairness, and that is what the Second Part of the book is about.

A dictum of cultural psychology is that "culture and psyche make each other up". You cannot study the mind, while ignoring the culture in which it exists. Minds function only when they have been filled out by the culture. To take from part one of the book, we are all pre-wired, but not hard-wired with our intuitions, and our hard-wiring is filled out by our culture and environment. We are pre-wired with our intuitions and moral matrices at birth, but that pre-wiring is strengthened, modified, or altered by our culture and the environments in which we live. This is particularly true of children. In studying human morality, culture cannot be ignored. There are three basic themes of the morality or ethics of any culture, those being: 1) *Autonomy*, the idea that people are, first and foremost, autonomous individuals with wants, needs and preferences (a strong Western or WEIRD theme), 2) *Community*, the idea that people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities, such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes and nations, with people having an obligation to perform their assigned roles in each of these entities (giving rise to moral concepts of duty, hierarchy, respect, reputation and patriotism), and 3) *Divinity*, the idea that people are, first and foremost, temporary vessels within which a divine soul has been implanted (giving rise in many societies to moral concepts such as sanctity, sin, purity and pollution, elevation and degradation-including beliefs that the human mind automatically perceives a kind of vertical dimension of social space, running from God or moral perfection at the top, down through angels, humans, other animals, monsters, demons, and then the devil, or perfect evil, at the bottom). These three concepts or themes of morality or moral, ethical thought, give rise in each society, culture, group, nation or tribe to a *moral-matrices*, which provides a complete, unified, and emotionally compelling worldview, easily justified by observable evidence and "nearly impregnable to attack by arguments from outsiders". Our moralities or moral- matrices are, therefore, multiple from the start. We each have, and each culture,

group or tribe has a moral-matrices which has “multiple receptors” if you will. Our author discusses these receptors at length.

Building on the concept of the multiple factors which make up an individual’s, group’s, culture’s or tribe’s moral matrices, the author (backed up by substantial psychological and scientific research) identifies what he refers to as “moral taste buds” or “six moral receptors”, which, like our taste buds do for our tastes in foods, initiate our moral intuitions. I am going to have to leave it to you, Dear Reader, to read the Chapters which identify and describe these moral taste buds or receptors, and which discuss how they work. To start, the author states that “*the righteous mind is like a tongue with six taste receptors*”. “*Moral matrices vary, but they all must please righteous minds equipped with the same six receptors*”. These receptors initiate our moral decision-making processes. So, if we want to persuade people to our side we need to invoke as many of these six receptors as we can do. These receptors are the triggers for our moral decisions. There are *original triggers* and there are *current triggers*. *Original Triggers* are the set of objects for which a given module (a given receptor) was designed, and *current triggers* are the things in our current world that happen to trigger it. For example, original triggers might be snakes, and a snake detection module. The current triggers might be things which appear like snakes, such as ropes, toy snakes, curved sticks and thick ropes. “Cultural variation in any morality can be explained in part by noting that cultures can shrink or expand the current triggers of any module. For example, in the past fifty years people in many Western societies have come to feel compassion in response to many kinds of animal suffering and they’ve come to feel disgust in response to many fewer kinds of sexual activity....Furthermore, within any given culture, many moral controversies turn out to involve competing ways to link behavior to a moral module. Should parents and teachers be allowed to spank children for disobedience?” In the author’s view (which is well documented) there are six universal cognitive modules (receptors) upon which cultures construct moral matrices, and they are: 1) Care/Harm (e.g. of a current trigger, the clubbing of baby, white, harp seals), 2) Fairness/Cheating (to reap the benefits of a two way partnership, each must pull his or her own load), 3) Loyalty/Betrayal (form cohesive coalitions such as a sports team, and remain loyal to it) 4) Authority/Subversion (respect authority, such as the police or government), 5) Sanctity/Degradation (avoid contaminations, disgust, exhibit temperance, chastity, piety and cleanliness), 6) Liberty/Oppression (we value personal liberty, but oppose perceived bullies who seek to enforce their ways on others, or who exert power to oppress rather than to achieve a good end). Each of these six Receptors is discussed, at length, in several Chapters of the book. Each of such Chapters starts out with an anecdotal story which demonstrates the existence of the Receptor, and then explains how it is triggered, and then, as is the case of each of the book’s Chapters, ends with a summation of what is taught by the Chapter. While we are pre-wired with our moral receptors at birth, that pre-wiring is not hard-wired, and our receptors or our respective six moral modules (and those of any culture) are modified over time by culture or experiences.

The author (who is a liberal democrat who advised both John Kerry and Barack Obama) points out that, when it comes to the language of politics, conservatives have the upper hand. Liberals/progressives/those on the left couch their messages towards the Care/Fairness receptor or module, whereas conservatives couch their messages towards all six receptors or modules.

(A Note about innateness: As stated above the author is of the opinion that many of our intuitive/moral module receptors are received by us at birth. However, he submits that they are not hard-wired. They are *prewired* not *hardwired*. “Nature provides the first draft, which experience revises.” The author is propounding “Moral Foundation Theory”, a Theory which seeks to explain how the first draft gets revised during childhood to produce the diversity of moralities that we find across cultures-and across the political spectrum. Now, I am going to insert a personal note here. This book, the oldest book,

does not mention the effects of the internet, web sites, or chatrooms or heavy internet use on children. However, as noted above, I believe that these three books build on each other. If we assume that our innate, nature prewired first drafts of our moral foundations become rewritten and hardwired during childhood by our experiences and environment, then it is not difficult to conclude that a child's or young person's heavy use, perhaps addictive use of the internet and social media and web sites will adversely impact that individual's eventual hard wired moral foundations.)

(A Note About Psychopaths: I understand that this Note is outside of the scope of this Review, but I found the author's views about psychopaths to be very enlightening. I, like many of you Dear Readers, have always thought that no-one is born a serial killer, mass murderer or true psychopath, but, rather, that these individuals are caused to be what they are by their experiences during childhood or other environmental causes. I was wrong. Psychopaths, roughly one out of every 100 males (less for females) commit nearly half of the most serious crimes, although most of them are not violent. They seem to live in a world of objects (some of whom are people). They have the ability to reason, but lack any moral emotions. They are not caused by poor parenting, and there is no nurture-based explanation for them. They have a genetically heritable condition that creates a brain that is unmoved by the needs, suffering or dignity of others. In the case of the elephant-rider metaphor, their rider is perfectly normal- he does the strategic reasoning quite well, but his job is totally to serve the elephant, not serve as any moral compass. Now tell me that this isn't scary. How in the world can you ever predict or anticipate just who is or might be a psychopath?)

3) MORALITY BINDS AND BLINDS

The Central Metaphor for this part of the book is: *We Are 90 Percent Chimp and 10 Percent Bee*. The author's position is that most of our moral decision making is a form of enlightened self-interest, but that portrait is incomplete as we also have a strong innate need for "groupishness". We people are *groupish*. While human nature is *selfish*, it is also *groupish*, and our minds contain a variety of mental mechanisms that make them adept at promoting our *group's* interests, in competition with other groups. "Humans construct moral communities out of shared norms, institutions and gods that, even in the twenty-first century, they fight, kill and die to defend." They develop a group-mindedness-the ability to learn and conform to social norms, feel and share group-related emotions, and, ultimately, to create and obey social institutions, including religion. Unlike chimpanzees, who almost always, 100 percent, act in their own individual self-interests and not for the benefit of the group, humans have a need for groupishness, in which they act for the benefit of the group, the hive. Hence, the metaphor, "We are 90 percent chimp and 10 percent bee". We want to belong to the hive.

If humans have a desire to belong to the group, the hive, how do we motivate them to belong to our hive? The author proposes that humans have a "HIVE SWITCH", a switch which brings them into the hive and then brings them into conformity with the group goals, needs and morality of the hive. What can cause a group of people who are 90 percent driven to act in their own self-interest, to form a cohesive group, a cohesive hive? The author cites several mechanisms for switching on this Hive Switch. 1) Muscular Bonding can be caused by group participation in certain rites or rituals, such as, for a military unit, extensive close-order drilling, and also participation at a RAVE event (or the Native American Synchronous dancing), 2) Group Singing, such as the singing of recognized hymns or songs which can be readily sung together, 3) Group Fanhood at a football game, 4) Group listening to a good sermon 5) Coming together to engage in group dancing, 5) Communal Awe in nature, and 6) Religious Rites and practices. (Note: Why have many young males recently gravitated to Roman Catholicism? They seem to find mystery in the Rites and Practices of Catholicism, and their Hive Switches are thereby activated.)

There are, in short, many ways to invoke the Hive Switch, the Switch which causes us humans to join and form a cohesive group or organization (including a company, church, sports team, political party, etc.) and to conform to the moral norms and practices of that group. Once we do that our Righteous Minds compel us to form impregnable arguments in defense of the norms and morals of our group, arguments which we will defend against all “outsiders”. Morality, the moral system and norms of our group, binds us of that group together, but blinds us to the moral systems and norms of those who are outside of our group. Morality, therefore, Binds and Blinds. If I, or my group, is convinced that I or they have a totally righteous mind about moral principles, then I am, or my group is Blind to the moral makeup of those who are “opposing us”. We sure don’t have open minds.

Research on what is referred to as “social capital”, meaning a population which is generally content, “has demonstrated that bowling leagues, churches, and other kinds of groups, teams and clubs are crucial for the health of individuals and of a nation....social capital that is generated by such local groups ‘makes us smarter, healthier, safer and richer, and able to govern a just and stable democracy’.” A nation of purely autonomous individuals is likely to be hungry for meaning.

The author, an atheist, is of the firm belief that religion and churches are essential to a nation or society with high moral capital. Religious rites are very important in that they pull people up from the “lower level, the so called *profane* to the higher level, the *sacred*”. Religious Rites invoke the Hive Switch. “Believing, doing, and belonging are three complementary, yet distinct aspects of religiosity”, the goal of such aspects is to create a community.

As pastors or church leaders, our goal is to bring people into community, and to use the tools which are available to invoke the Hive Switch which will create a cohesive community, such as great music, communal singing, religious rites, and compelling sermons.

AUTHOR’S DEFINITION OF MORALITY

So, all of this aside, what is the author’s ultimate definition of Morality. It is as follows: “Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible.” This is, obviously, a functionalist definition. It defines the function of morality, what morality does, as opposed to specifying what content constitutes the moral.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO DISAGREE MORE CONSTRUCTIVELY

Frankly, I was a bit disappointed with this part of the book. Other than for a few snippets of advice, I was unable to find any advice from the author about how the chaotic situations in some of our institutions, particularly the U.S. Congress, might be changed for the better. It seems that his best advice is that people need to look at controversial issues with a view towards our common humanity, as opposed to an Us Versus Them mentality, in which those who disagree with us are viewed, not as fellow human beings who are, quite possibly as patriotic and concerned about the overall good as we are, but as the enemy which must be defeated, even humiliated. This seems to be great advice, but one has to wonder whether it is capable of being implemented. I might be so bold as to suggest that it is in this area that the church, and Christianity in general might have a strong role to play. If we can look at each other as fellow human beings who are created in the image of God, and, perhaps, even raise the What Would Jesus Do question about various social and economic issues and problems, maybe some peaceful decorum can be achieved.

The author does, however, point out just how fixed in our intuitions and moral matrices we become at an early age. He uses the examples of siblings, who are close to each other in age, and of twins. The siblings and twins are raised in the same family, and the same environments. Yet, for some reason, from an early age and going forward, they manifest distinctly different moral, ethical and political views. It is not at all unusual to find that one sibling or twin grows up to be on the far left of the political spectrum, and another on the far right of that spectrum. They can barely discuss politics. The author surmises that something in the genetic makeup of an individual's brain causes him or her to be pre-wired in certain ways, and that such pre-wiring tends to lead him or her in a given direction throughout life.

II) **THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND/HOW GOOD INTENTIONS AND BAD IDEAS ARE SETTING UP A GENERATION FOR FAILURE**

This book, which is the second book in order of time of publication that is Reviewed here, is much easier to Review, and read and absorb than is the first book, *The Righteous Mind*. The main thesis of the authors, Haidt and Lukianoff, is easily understood, and their arguments for that thesis are clear and easily understood. They are also very well supported by psychological research and studies and statistical analyses.

The authors' main thesis or contention is that the very sharp escalation of mental and emotional disorders, particularly depression and anxiety, which has been observed to have occurred within a generation of young people with birth years in 1995 and after 1995 (they call these people the "iGen" generation, meaning the "i PHONE GENERATION" (some refer to it as "Generation Z")) has resulted from the imposition upon that generation of THREE BAD IDEAS, ideas which are totally contrary to all human wisdom developed over time. These three bad ideas are: 1) The Untruth of fragility/What Doesn't Kill You Will Make You Weaker (i.e. Children are weak and fragile and need to be protected from, not just physical harm, but also from emotional harm), 2) The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning/Always Trust Your Feelings, and 3) The Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a Battle Between Good People and Bad People.

In the authors' view, the implementation of these three bad ideas, and the imposing of them upon the young people of the iGeneration, has caused terrible consequences and has set up the young people of that generation for failure in the Real World once they have concluded their education. These three bad ideas have also resulted in much of what can be observed in colleges and universities today, including the cancel culture environment (i.e. cancel out, disinvite or shout down speakers and teachers who might say something the students or some of the students do not agree with and, therefore, find to be "upsetting to their emotions or sense of safety") and the need to give students a "trigger warning" if some topic might be upsetting to some, and the complete lack of intellectual and philosophical and political diversity which we find among our college professors.

I will try to summarize, in an outline format, the authors' views, as follows:

(Note: The authors' views are anything but off-the-cuff views. They are supported by extensive psychological and scientific studies and statistical analysis. I find these views to be very persuasive.)

- 1) CODDLING: The title to the book indicates that the authors' belief that the minds of the individuals of the iGeneration have been and are being coddled. In their view, "coddling" means "overprotected." Their minds (and bodies for that matter) have been and are being

- overprotected from the risks and stressors, physical, mental and emotional, with which they will have to deal as life goes forward. They are made weaker, not stronger, by this overprotection. (This reminds me of a quotation of a statement made by the founder of Dubai, a very prosperous country in the UAE. He was asked about the future of his very prosperous country. His reply: “My grandfather rode a camel. My father rode a camel. I ride a Mercedes, my son rides a Land Rover, and my grandson is going to ride a Land Rover...but my great-grandson is going to have to ride a camel again”. Why is that, he was asked? And his reply: “Hard times create strong men, strong men create easy times. Easy times create weak men, weak men create difficult times. Many will not understand it, but you have to raise warriors, not parasites.” The point of this quotation is that people, particularly young people, need to be allowed to undergo some of the stressors and problems and adversities of life, in order to grow up as strong people. Hence, the myth that children and youngsters are fragile, both physically and emotionally, and that their physical and emotional safety must be protected at all cost, is creating a weak and fragile generation.)
- 2) FRAGILITY: There is a huge misconception that children and young people are fragile, and must be protected from any and all physical and emotional risks. This misconception leads to paranoid parenting and so called “helicopter parenting”, which seeks to protect children and young people from all risks, whether real or perceived, leading to their becoming risk averse and emotionally stunted.
 - 3) SAFETYISM: At first, the word “safety” generally meant physical safety. However, the meaning of “safety” has undergone a “concept creep”, and has now been expanded to include “emotional safety”, and a perceived need for children and young people to feel “emotionally safe”, and to be guarded from having to hear or confront speech or ideas which they do not like and which they find to be unsafe for their feelings and emotions. So called “safe-spaces” and “trigger warnings” have to be provided for them. Certainly, politically challenging speech must be avoided, and speakers who might offer it are to be barred or disinvited.
 - 4) FLAWED CONCEPT: The concept of safetyism, taken to its current extremes, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature and the dynamics of trauma and recovery. “A culture that allows the concept of ‘safety’ to creep so far that it equates emotional discomfort with physical danger is a culture that encourages people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences embedded in daily life that they need in order to become strong and healthy.”
 - 5) THE FLAWED IDEA OF “ALWAYS TRUST YOUR FEELINGS”/THE UNTRUTH OF EMOTIONAL REASONING: In the first book, *the Righteous Mind*, author Haidt used the Elephant and the Elephant Rider as a metaphor for the way in which most of us make moral decisions. The Elephant represents the intuitions of the individual and the Rider, Reasoning or language - based thinking of the mind. The mind has two components, intuition/the elephant, and language-based reasoning/the rider. Much of what goes on in the mind of an individual are processes which are “automatic” or “intuitive”, and are outside of the individual’s direct control. The automatic, the intuitive, the elephant, is far stronger than the rider. While the rider can believe that he is in control, the elephant is far stronger and tends to win any conflict that arises between the two. The rider becomes skillful in producing post-hoc justification for whatever the elephant does or believes. “Emotional reasoning is the cognitive distortion that occurs whenever the rider interprets whatever is happening in ways that are consistent with the elephant’s emotional state, without investigating whether or not it is true”, without even investigating whether or not it is true or false. “If the rider can reframe a situation so that the elephant sees it in a new way, then the elephant will feel new feelings, too, which will then motivate the elephant to move in a new direction.” “Individuals who engage in purely

- emotional reasoning, reasoning in which the elephant rules and the rider just goes along or does nothing, can get themselves caught in a 'feedback loop' in which irrational negative beliefs cause powerful negative feelings, which in turn seem to drive the individual's reasoning, motivating them to find evidence to support their negative beliefs". This can lead to the **"Cognitive Triad of Depression": "I'm No Good", "My World is Bleak", and "My Future is Hopeless"**. These beliefs can become a stable and enduring psychological structure. They become a **"Cognitive Distortion of Reality"**. They are destructive and debilitating. In other words, they become a self-fulfilling prophecy, unless this distorted thinking is disrupted.
- 6) CRITICAL THINKING: Individuals who are subjected to the concept that they are fragile, physically and emotionally, and who are allowed to "trust their feelings", thereby causing them to just accept the way they feel and to fear anything that might cause them to feel "unsafe", or who become subject to the Triad of Depression, are unable to engage in any "Critical Thinking", which "includes a commitment to connect claims to reliable evidence in a proper way-which is the basis of scholarship- and of sound emotional reasoning".
 - 7) MICROAGGRESSIONS/THE TRIUMPH OF IMPACT OVER INTENT: A "microaggression" is a brief and commonplace act of daily behavior or environmental occurrence, whether intentional or unintentional, which is perceived to communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative insult or slight, such as a racial slight or insult towards people of color. While "aggression" implies an intent, a "microaggression" rests entirely in the terms of the listener's interpretation, regardless of the speaker's intentions. The listener is encouraged to engage in emotional reasoning. If the statement made me feel bad or slighted or unsafe, then I have been subjected to a microaggression, even though absolutely no insult or slight or disparagement was intended by the speaker. Universities, colleges, and some corporations and other institutions are encouraging people to watch out for or be sensitive to any microaggression which they might perceive as impacting them, and to report the event for investigation and action. Let's face it, if each of us wanted to worry about microaggressions we would have many to worry about and report every day. They are a fact of life.
 - 8) THE UNTRUTH OF US VERSUS THEM: LIFE IS A BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD PEOPLE AND EVIL PEOPLE: A principle of philosophy and rhetoric is known as the "principle of charity", "which says that one should interpret other people's statements (and probably actions for that matter) in their best, most reasonable form, not in the worst or most offensive way possible". In many schools, colleges and universities students are encouraged or allowed to engage in dichotomous, us versus them thinking, where in most cases of a moral issue or dilemma there are two people or classes of people, the *victim* and the *oppressor*. This concept totally ignores the long-standing principle of charity, and the ignoring of that principle is having a terrible effect on our young people and, yes, our culture. It discourages any sort of compromise thinking process. It encourages people or groups or political parties to look at those with whom they disagree as the enemy, to be opposed at all costs. Since, as pointed out in the first book the human mind is prepared for groupishness or tribalism, when our "Hive Switch" is activated we prepare for intergroup or inter-tribal conflict, and we bind ourselves more tightly to our group or tribe and defend it and those of it against all comers, who we perceived as being the enemy. As stated in the first book, *morality binds and blinds*. Tribal instincts, when projected into politics, can lead to "identity politics."
 - 9) IDENTITY POLITICS/THERE ARE TWO KINDS, ONE GOOD AND THE OTHER NOT SO GOOD: There are two types of Identity Politics. One is the type practiced and preached by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Common Identity Politics (sometimes referred to as Common Humanity Politics), the politics which espouses the belief that we are all Humans or all Patriots, or all Americans, or that we have a Common Identity or Common Interests, etc., and that we have

and can strive for common goals, and the other of which is Common Enemy Identity Politics, the type of Politics of which we have seen a huge rise in recent years. It is a politics which is based on an effort to unite and mobilize multiple groups to fight against a perceived common enemy. "Identifying a Common Enemy is an effective way to enlarge and motivate your tribe." For example, Marxism (and one might argue, socialism and fascism) seeks to motivate the "proletariat", the poor or disadvantaged against the so-called elite. It sometimes becomes Class Warfare Politics.

- 10) MARCUSEANISM: A foremost Marxist thinker was Herbert Marcuse, a German philosopher, whose philosophies were used by the Nazis. His thinking has permeated some American colleges and universities. That thinking proposes that a form of "discriminatory tolerance" is to be used in order to take away the power of the oppressors, the elite, wealthy and ultimately conservatives by discriminating against and tamping down some of their rights, such as the right to free speech and the right to own private property, and to protect the rights of the oppressed, the poor and downtrodden and disadvantaged. In the first book our author, Jonathan Haidt, mentioned a philosophy comparable to that of Marcuseanism, "Manichaeism", a philosophy initiated by a third-century Persian prophet, Mani, who preached that "the visible world is the battleground between the forces of Light (absolute goodness) and the forces of darkness (absolute evil). If you think about politics or arguments or rhetoric in either a Marcuseanism or Manichaeism way then compromise is not possible. It is a sin. You cannot compromise between Good and Evil. There is no possible compromise, and whatever you need to do to stamp out the Evil, the other side, you must do. This sort of thinking has permeated many of our institutions, including colleges and universities and certainly the U.S. Congress and our political parties. Part of this way of thinking has been brought about by a very good thing, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (no argument, it is completely right and good), which caused a total political realignment. Before that Act the south was solidly Democratic and opposed to the Republicans, the party of Lincoln who freed the slaves. After that Act, the south became solidly Republican. Southern Democrats had been more moderate or conservative in their views, and Republicans from the east and north were more progressive in their views. So, there were conservatives and progressives in each party. No more. Now the most progressive Republican Representative or Senator is more conservative than the most conservative Democratic Representative or Senator. The two parties have become dramatically, opposing tribes, with little middle ground. So, if we are going to engage in Identity Politics or Tribal Politics there is no room for compromise. You cannot compromise with Evil, the Enemy. It is totally Us versus Them.
- 11) INTERSECTIONALITY: This theory, which is widely taught and is very hard for me to understand, stands for the proposition that people should see the world of social interactions as being one where all such interactions represent a form of ubiquitous intersection between oppressors/an oppressor and the oppressed/an oppressed person, or between privilege and oppression. Oppressed people (including women, girls, LGBTQ individuals, minority people, poor people) are basically "colonized" by males, non-LGBTQ people (i.e. cis-gendered people), the rich and elites, etc., who are oppressing everyone else. Almost every political transaction or interaction (and many, normal, day to day interactions or transactions) are purported to have an intersection of oppression or "colonization". This theory has a great deal of respect in many academic institutions and schools. If you are taught to look at the world in this way, how are you going to feel about compromising with a colonizer, an oppressor, or even treating them with civility.
- 12) SOME RESULTS: I am not going to get into all of the authors' identified results of the use/imposition of these Bad Ideas. Suffice it to say that they believe (backed up by

psychological and scientific data and studies) that these Bad Ideas have led to the existence of entire generations of young people who are absolutely ill equipped to deal with the normal stressors and harms and bad things which are a normal part of daily life in this broken world in which we live. They are fearful, sometimes weak, prone to depression and anxious people., always looking out for someone who is trying to oppress them. They find all fault to be within the system or its institutions, and never within themselves. However, in order to point out a few specific results of the Bad Ideas I would note that the authors point out:

- A) The Cancel Culture, the culture of cancelling speakers or entertainers, or TV personalities who express or might express ideas that are not “in conformity with appropriate thinking.”
- B) Violent Protests, in which violence and destruction of property are now perceived as being appropriate ways to oppose people, thoughts or ideas which are perceived to be unsafe, offensive or not in accord with the mainstream.
- C) “Witch Hunts” Among College Professors and Administrators: If a Dean, other College Administrator or Professor is perceived to have made a statement that is perceived to be offensive to any group of students, even though no offense was intended, and the statement is really innocuous, and the individual apologizes and seeks to correct any misunderstanding about his or her statement, he or she must go, and even those in the institution who support the speaker are afraid to speak out. Numerous instances of these Witch Hunts are identified.

I know that this is making a gross generalization statement on my part, and I know that many of our colleges and universities (hopefully including my University of Missouri) are good institutions which encourage good scholarship and critical thinking. However, having read this book I am very discouraged about just what kinds of good, strong, hardened young leaders we are producing. I leave it to you, Dear Reader, to reach your own conclusions.

III) **THE ANXIOUS GENERATION/HOW THE GREAT REWIRING OF CHILDHOOD IS CAUSING AN EPEDEMIC OF MENTAL ILLNESS:**

Well, finally, we reach the last of the three books which are the subjects of this Review. While I think that it is the most important book of the three books which are reviewed, it is the easiest one of the books to read and to review. You might have already guessed, from the book’s subtitle, “How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Emotional Illness” that the author’s concerns are all related to Smart Phones, computers, the internet and its websites and social media. You would be partially right. However, the author has an additional concern, which is that we are, by depriving our children of a lot of non-adult supervised free play, independence and autonomy, depriving them of much of many of the learning processes which are required for proper childhood brain development. This book is the story, or at least a large part of the story, about what has happened to the generation born after 1995, which is popularly known as Generation Z, and which is referred to in the preceding book reviewed in Part II of this Review as “the iGeneration”, with “I” standing for I phones. This generation, whatever we want to call it, is identified by the author, Jonathan Haidt, as “The Anxious Generation”, because it has suffered from a total onslaught of mental and emotional disorders, including anxiety and depression. (And, if you refer to the book by Preston Sprinkle, which was reviewed on September 15, 2025, Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria, the incidents of which have exploded (some studies show by 5,000 percent over 10 years among girls and to a lesser extent among boys)). What has caused this explosion of mental and emotional disorders among “The Anxious Generation”? The author’s views, which are abundantly supported by psychological, psychiatric and scientific studies and statistics which he cites (and which are very

persuasive) are, in summary, that this explosion of mental and emotional disorders has two primary causes: FIRST: The Well-intentioned and disastrous shift towards overprotecting children, restricting their unsupervised by adults free play and their autonomy in the real world, as children need lots of free play to grow and learn, and SECOND: The explosion of technology through computers, laptops, tablets and cell phones, coupled with high-speed broadband, hyper-viralized social media, front facing cameras, the “likes” and “retweets” of social media and similar technologies, which have caused the individuals of the Anxious Generation to be the first generation in history to go through puberty with a portal in their pockets that called them away from people nearby and into an alternative universe that was exciting, addictive, unstable and unsuitable for children and adolescents. These two factors, both of which substantially contributed to cause, or were, in fact the cause of the explosion of mental disorders among children and adolescents of the Anxious Generation are extensively explored and discussed in this book.

As a practical fact we could probably close this Review with the summary of its contents set forth above, adding admonitions as follows (some of which supplement the findings of the authors in *Coddling the American Mind*):

- 1) Free Play And Anti-Fragility: In order to learn, mature, acquire social skills and the ability to live in the real world, we must allow for children to have substantial amounts of adult unsupervised Free Play, Independence and Autonomy, and recognize that the rise in the mantra that “children are fragile and both their physical safety and emotional safety require protection” is both wrong and is leading to disastrous results among children and adolescents.
- 2) Re-Wiring: Children and adolescents have not only been subjected to a lack of Free Play and Independence, but they have had their brains re-wired, particularly at the significant ages of puberty, by the internet, pervasive social media (with its retweets and “Likes” and Front Facing Cameras) and constant exposure to web-sites which are not only inappropriate for children and adolescents (e.g. pornographic web sites, including those which allow an individual to create an A.I. generated “companion”) but some of which are downright dangerous in that they encourage acts of violence and suicide and other atrocities. Some of these Web-Sites on the so-called the Dark Web are those which rest in a sub-culture of animal mutilation, child pornography, encouragement of, and how to instructions for suicide and violence against others, such as web-sites for 764 and the “Order of 9 Angels”, a satanic, right-wing group. These dark-web websites actually encourage suicide and acts of violence against others (i.e, if life is hopeless and you need to (and you should) commit suicide, don’t go out by yourself-take other people with you) animal mutilation and other atrocities.

Probably, at this point, enough said. However, I will try to summarize some of the book’s other contents, all of which are well supported and documented by the psychological and scientific studies and statistical analyses cited in the book:

- A) AGE CLASSIFICATIONS: The author categorizes individuals as follows: Children, 0-12, Adolescents, 13-19, Teens, 20-29, Minors, anyone under age 18.
- B) RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS/EMBODIED AND DISEMBODIED: They are embodied when we deal with people, face to face, and we are conscious of the bodies of others, and we respond consciously or unconsciously. They are disembodied when no body is needed, just language, and partners could be (and already are) artificial intelligence partners. For centuries, human relationships have largely been embodied, and depended more on personal contacts, one on one or one on several, etc., but the internet allows, in fact encourages and requires disembodied relationships. You can chat remotely and anonymously

- with other people and groups. You can even chat with your own AI generated companion, who is tailored to your specific needs and desires, and who supports your every whim.
- C) SUGGESTIONS FOR CORRECTION OF THE PROBLEM: The author strongly suggests that actions be taken, immediately, as follows:
- 1) No Smart Phones Before High School, with children receiving, earlier, only basic cell phones before 9th grade, roughly age 14.
 - 2) No Social-Media Before Age 16, which allows children to get through the most vulnerable period of brain development before connecting them to the firehose of social media comparisons, Likes and Dislikes and algorithmically chosen influencers.
 - 3) Phone-Free Schools: In all Schools, elementary through high school, students should be required to store their phones, smartwatches, tablets and any other personal devices that can send or receive texts in a phone locker or locked pouches, during the school day, both during class time and during free times and between class times-NO PHONES, ETC. IN SCHOOL AT ANY TIME.
 - 4) Far More Unsupervised Play and Childhood Independence: That's the way children naturally develop social skills, overcome anxiety and become self-governing adults.
- D) THE WAVE BEGINS: The causes cited in this book, lack of free play and childhood independence, and the rewiring by smart phones and similar devices and their accoutrements have led to a wave of mental and emotional disorders, such as anxiety and depression (and, on the basis of Preston Sprinkle's book, I would urge Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria) starting in roughly 2010, and there are no other reasonable suggestions for other causes for this wave.
- E) 2010-2015: With the advents of the smart phone, and the developments of sophisticated social-media and websites, children and adolescents began to spend less and less time in interpersonal, one on one or one or many interactions and free play, and more and more time in social media and internet websites, up to an average of 7 hours a day. They have become addicted to social-media, likes and dislikes, and totally inappropriate or worse web sites.
- F) HURTS GIRLS MORE: Girls have suffered and are suffering more harm than are boys. The use of "filters", which allow for the filtering of images in order to make one appear more beautiful than is the case, and the tweeting about events to which a girl is not invited, and what can only be called "girl bullying" (from which a girl cannot escape at home) are all causing girls to have poor self-impressions, to feel left out, to feel isolated, to feel that they are not worthy, and to become depressed. The results can be disastrous, including incidents of suicide or self-harm (and, probably, Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria, which has been far more prevalent among girls than boys). In many cases the social lives of girls revolve totally around social media.
- G) PORNOGRAPHY AND GAMING: Boys are more prone than are girls to the use of pornographic web sites, and this use is very damaging to their abilities to establish appropriate social and romantic relationships with girls. It is a whole lot less scary to view pornography, particularly if it includes an AI generated female companion, than it is to have to ask a girl for a date, and suffer possible rejection. Boys are also more prone than girls to become addicted to internet gaming web sites, and spend countless hours in internet gaming.
- H) FAILURE TO LAUNCH: Addiction to the internet, social media and we sites can result in an individual's electing to spend time in their bedroom, using the internet, and not seeking employment, education or training or any positive future in the real world. Hence, the so-called "Failure to Launch" generation.
- I) THE GOD-SHAPED HOLE: While the author purports himself to be an atheist, I am beginning to doubt his assertions in this respect. He, and many psychological researches cited by him, agree that virtually every human being has what he refers to as a "God-Shaped Hole". Each

of us has a need to connect with something higher and more perfect than ourselves. Of course, for Christians that “something” is God. In any event, in the author’s view, this God-Shaped Hole can either be filled with what he and others call “the *sacred*” or what he and others call “the *profane*”. The profane is what each of us encounters, daily and hourly and moment by moment in the real world, the world which we Christians would say is “broken” and almost anyone would say is “totally messed up”. The sacred is that which is above us, and outside of us, and is that which each of us seeks. It is what we feel when we participate in religious practices, such as prayer, group hymn or religious song singing, and religious rites. We can either fill our God Shaped Hole with Good Things, Sacred Things, Things which elevate us and, to some extent take us out of ourselves, or we can fill it with Bad Things, the Profane, Distorted Cognitive reasoning, the junk (or worse) on the internet, etc. Somehow, we need to find ways to fill the God-Shaped Hole of our children and young people with the Sacred, taking them away from the Profane of the internet, its websites and social media.

I could certainly go on with this summary, but I don’t think that it is necessary to do so. This summary should encourage you, Dear Reader, to read this book. If you do, then I am convinced that you will become as concerned about what is happening to our children and young people as I am. Candidly, this book scares me to death. It terrifies me. PLEASE READ IT AND FIND WAYS TO HELP PARENTS AND CHILDREN DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS EXPLAINED IN THIS BOOK, A VERY, VERY IMPORTANT BOOK.

(A PERSONAL NOTE: I know that it is unbelievable to think that a book published in 2024 might be a bit behind the curve when it confronts some of the problems created for children by technology. That said, there has been, and will continue to be a virtual explosion of Artificial Intelligence, AI, and its impacts on the websites and internet. So-called *generative AI*, allows for web creators to create AI Models, so-called Large Language Models, which will receive huge amounts of data and information, and convert it (and the new data or images or text and voice comments which it will generate) into new data. This explosion of technology allows for the creation of very life-like, realistic AI generated Avatars or Companions, who will engage in very realistic conversations with a youngster. All of this explosion of technology hits children and adolescents at times when they are most vulnerable, as their brains are just developing. What will they become? I did a Review some substantial time ago on a book entitled “*21 Questions for the Twenty-First Century*”. The author of that book was very prescient in his predictions of what technology is going to bring to us (or, one might say, “bring upon us”). He predicted many of the impacts which will be caused by AI. He even predicted what might be called “the demise of the human race” or “the extinction of the human race”. Almost every single species which has ever inhabited the earth has had a limited life span, and in most cases that life span has been ended by a virus. The author considers the marriage of human bodies and minds with AI in the formation of a sort of Android, as being the virus that will eliminate humanity as we know it. Human beings, as we know them, will no longer exist. They will become a combination of a biological, human body and mind with an AI chip or some such which will provide “wisdom”, knowledge, instructions and, perhaps “commands”. I sometimes wonder whether the “Terminator” movies in which humans are at war with machines which are creating themselves are all that far-fetched.)

HOW TO READ THESE BOOKS

Actually, these books are rather easy to read, whether you read them in their entirety, as I would hope that you will do, or just want to scan read them in order to ascertain the nature of their contents in order to decide whether you want to read them or parts of them. The authors have done a marvelous job in setting up each book. Each book has a wonderful, actually very complete

Introduction, in which the authors tell you, in a very complete fashion, what they are going to say in the book. The Tables of Contents are very explanatory. Each book is divided into Parts, each of which contains several Chapters. The authors have Summed Up, at the end of each Chapter, what they have said in the Chapter. So, if you just read the Introduction, Scan the Table of Contents, look at the beginning of each Chapter and read the Summing Up at its end, you are going to have a very good idea about what the authors say in the book and each of its Chapters, and you can then decide whether you want to read the book or a part of it or a chapter.

IS THIS BOOK SUITABLE FOR THE TEI LIBRARY OR FOR USE IN ANY TEI/ECLI CLASS

While I think that these are very important books, and that they should be read and studied by any Pastor, certainly any Youth Pastor, Christian Teacher who is responsible for teaching Christian Children or Young Persons, and any Parent or person having responsibility for the care of young people I have to respond to these questions with a No. TEI maintains a theological library, and its classes and those of ECLI are directed to theology. These are not theological books. However, in some respects I think that their contents might well be more important to churches and their leaders than are theology. Just my opinion.

Thank You!

Dan Simon