

Dear Jonathan Haidt:

I admire the compelling work you have done in marshalling evidence of the effects of social media, such as Instagram and Tumblr, on teenagers, especially girls. From your article in the Atlantic magazine and long-form interviews on YouTube, I know that you have made your case, and social media clearly contributes to the cultural fragmentation and increasing political polarization that worries you. But there is another—and deeper—cause that will be recognized by science before long, and I believe that you will find it interesting and useful because it will enable you to see your work in a larger context. It depends on a prediction of a discovery by physicists, and though it may seem unlikely, I have an argument justifying it whose consequences reveal this deeper cause of current events.

As a social psychologist, you assume that all human beings are language-using animals who can see into one another's minds and have rational powers that enable them to agree about what to do in particular situations, and you study regularities about how social conditions affect the outcomes of such interactions. You necessarily abstract from the content of the discussions, and there is room for another basic cause of political polarization because outcomes also depend on what is believed. Religious beliefs are relevant because they are about an objective difference between good and bad that justifies treating others morally. This may seem like an issue in individual psychology, but I think you were right to resist Jordan Peterson's explanation of religion as an instinctive admiration of heroes that leads us to identify with others who share our admiration. I think we might agree about religion being an aspect of the nature of society as a whole, though we might disagree about how to explain it. In any case, religious beliefs represent the kind of cause that I believe that social psychology tends to leave out.

For example, though I don't know the numbers, I would predict that social media do not have as great an effect on teenagers in non-Western societies as they do in the West, and less effect in Eastern Europe where the Greek Catholic Church is still strong than in post-Christian Western Europe and Anglophone countries generally. That is relevant in explaining political polarization because it tends to occur in societies in which there is no longer a shared religion. Without a justification of the objective goodness of moral rules, such as the duty of civility, that is, showing respect for others when interacting with them, they are more likely to be trolls in social media and abuse those who disagree with them.

Again, though I don't know the numbers, I would predict that religion can be shown to play a role in the political polarization in America. The way that social psychology abstracts from the content of beliefs can be seen in your careful description of both sides as equally to blame for the abusive behavior that polarizes the left and the right. You may disagree with me, but as an observer of this phenomenon, it seems to me that there is a relevant asymmetry. Reflective subjects on the right are more likely to believe in God and use the objective difference between good and evil to defend constitutional rights that give them the freedom to be left alone. Those on the left tend to be humanists who are skeptical about the existence of the Judeo-Christian God and whose belief in science has deprived them of any shared defense of the objectivity of moral rules, much less an explanation of why they ought to be moral.

Please don't dismiss me as a partisan befuddled by confirmation bias. I am merely pointing to an asymmetry in the current culture war between those who offer arguments and those who use social power to censor arguments. And my point is that evidence of this difference would tend to confirm the deeper cause of

political polarization from which social psychology necessarily abstracts. Though I admire the ingenuity of your proposals about how to mitigate the fragmentation caused by social media, it is still just a way for scientific experts to use government power in controlling what people do. But I predict that an argument will draw all those divided by their stands on basic issues into agreement when science discovers the deeper cause of political polarization.

I call it a deeper cause because it is entailed by an unrecognized regularity about cultural change that is at least as necessary as the regularities studied in social psychology. Political polarization is more intense in Western civilization because the rise of science has caused the erosion of the religion it once shared, and when science discovers this regularity, it will have the opposite effect. This historical regularity is not even suspected because it is hidden from a science that is based on physics, and I predict that an empirical discovery that shows how interactions of substances generate the regularities described by laws of physics will give science a deeper and more complete foundation that enables biology to discover this regularity. My argument is spelled out in detail elsewhere. But it can be summed up rather briefly, and its unity and comprehensiveness will make it easy for you to tell whether you want to learn more. My argument begins in a historical context that you will recognize, though you might not describe it the same way.

The direction of change in our culture is distressing because we seem to be losing a great treasure that we inherited from the Enlightenment. That was the highpoint of Western confidence in reason. In science, the rational pursuit of truth was expected to settle all disagreements about what is true in a way that everyone would accept. In practical affairs, the belief that we are rational beings who can be trusted to be moral showed that political

institutions are legitimate only when they protect individual freedoms. And free markets were seen as rewarding entrepreneurial initiative and producing affluence.

But these days, no one believes that science will discover the complete explanation of nature that was expected of science when it began. What modern physics claims to have discovered at bottom is so different from what we ordinarily believe about the natural world that no one can even imagine what corresponds to its laws. Worse yet, what researchers in specialized fields currently believe is called “the science” and used as a political weapon to silence objections to administrative edicts. Though respect for the moral autonomy of rational beings was built into the US Constitution, the claim that the rights it protects are prior to government is defended only by those who believe in God—and they are expected to admit that the premise of their defense is a leap of faith. And capitalism is portrayed as an inequality of wealth protected by government because it is rule by the rich, if not an effect of systemic racism.

I call this decline from the Enlightenment endarkenment, and I believe that it is what divides our population into opposing political camps that cannot agree on facts about current events, much less values. Never in the lifetime of anyone alive has there been so much reason for pessimism about the direction of change, so little trust that existing institutions will see us through, and so much willingness to consider basic change. But endarkenment cannot be explained by recent historical events, and though the advent of social media may have contributed to it, the cause lies much deeper—but not so deep that it can't be understood.

The Enlightenment was a product of the ancient Greek belief that beings like us are capable of perfect knowledge, or literally, a complete explanation of what is found in the world. That cognitive

power was called Reason. But it took two forms in ancient Greece, and their incompatibility set them on different careers in history. While their interactions carried Western culture to the Enlightenment, the inability to reconcile them caused endarkenment.

Pre-Socratic philosophers expected to explain everything by using the empirical method to discover the first cause. In the end, they agreed that the first cause is all the substances constituting the natural world, but they never discovered kinds of substances that can explain everything found in it. The other way of acquiring perfect knowledge was metaphysics, which can be defined as the belief that Reason is a cognitive power that knows Reality behind Appearance. It began when Plato argued that rational intuition knows about the Forms in a realm of Being that are responsible for everything intelligible about the visible objects found in space, the realm of Becoming, and the problem posed by this dualism led to metaphysicians defending other ways of showing how rational intuition knows Reality behind Appearance.

Despite the difference in their methods, both kinds of perfect knowledge were attributed to Reason, and after the Renaissance, the rebirth of ancient confidence in Reason as natural philosophy and modern metaphysics blossomed into Enlightenment optimism about progress leading to perfect knowledge of the true and the good. Its offspring took two forms, which were irreconcilable in a similar way. One offspring was empirical science, which was expected to explain all the kinds of things found in the world. The other offspring was a religion based on metaphysics, which held that everyone is a Rational being because they were all created in the image of God. Rational beings could be trusted to be moral because knowledge of the difference between good and evil would cause them to choose freely to be moral, even when it was contrary to self-interest or opposed by strong desires. And respect

for the moral autonomy of Rational beings was the foundation for justifying liberal political institutions and capitalist economic institutions in Western civilization.

The cultural change currently distressing us is the loss of Enlightenment confidence in Reason. Scientific explanations of human cognition, such as those defended by Freud, Darwin, and Marx, have led to disillusionment with Reason. Though science is still our most reliable knowledge, it doesn't enable us to understand the basic nature of the world. For example, no one can believe that change is unreal, though that is true, if Einsteinian spacetime is what really exists. However, science is naturalistic, and the undeniable advance of science during the past few centuries has made belief in a supernatural God untenable. Belief in a God who created the natural world for a purpose is just a leap of faith. And since science cannot explain the nature of the good, it cannot explain why we ought to be moral, so trust in liberal political institutions has given way to the belief that we need an administrative state, run by experts, to promote the common good. Indeed, the contemporary commonplace about there being no such thing as the True, with a capital T, has replaced the rational pursuit of truth with relativism. Everyone is supposed to have their own reality. Even major scientific discoveries are seen as tentative because solutions to scientific problems always turn up new problems. These days, no one claims to show how Reason can give us perfect knowledge.

Reason will, however, triumph in the end. There is a deep cause of both the Enlightenment and endarkenment, and when a discovery made by physicists enables science to discover it, science will reverse the rising tide of endarkenment and restore the genius behind the 18th-Century Enlightenment as what I call the Second Enlightenment.

The deep cause of the metaphysical stage of evolution is intuitionism, the belief that knowledge comes from objects that are immediately present to us, as if they were given in a faculty of intuition. That is false because all knowledge depends on efficient causes at work in the brain, and intuitionism is a deep mistake because it is caused by an illusion built into the nature of consciousness (as the phenomenal aspect of experience). Like optical illusions, the illusion of intuitionism does not go away when it is recognized to be illusory. And this cause is so deep that it has been at work throughout the history of the West. After enabling metaphysics to give rise to the confidence in Reason that blossomed during the Enlightenment into science and liberal political institutions, it caused a decline of confidence in Reason in both philosophy and science.

Metaphysicians assumed that perception depends on a faculty of intuition, and assuming that there is also a faculty of rational intuition, they argued that intuitionistic Reason enables us to know Reality behind Appearance. But advances in science made the beliefs about the nature of the Reality that metaphysicians claimed to discover behind Appearance seem downright foolish, and since they included the belief that God created the natural world, theists were forced to admit that belief in God was just an act of faith. Without a way to defend the claim that Reason knows the True with a capital T, intuitionistic metaphysics gave way to romanticism, the belief that intense feelings or acts of extreme courage put us in touch with Reality behind Appearance. And after romanticism, intuitionism led to post-modern philosophers preaching the gospel of relativism and spreading it to popular culture.

To be sure, science is a form of naturalism that does not seem to be affected by intuitionism. It began by rejecting the metaphysicians' assumption that perception depends on a faculty

of intuition, and since scientists took themselves to be animals with sensory organs, they followed the pre-Socratics and used the empirical method to learn about the natural world. But what made science credible was the astonishing success of physics. As history shows, its success came from assuming that mathematics is known by a faculty of rational intuition. The Newtonian revolution gave physics a method that implicitly assumed that mathematically formulated laws of nature are the deepest possible empirical knowledge of the natural world. Since the use of a priori mathematics as a language to describe regularities blinded physics to some other regularities about change, the method of physics itself caused the intractable puzzles that now confront it—and that deprived other branches of science of a second kind of efficient cause, which is needed to explain the regularities they study completely.

Intuitionism was responsible for the rise of confidence in Reason in the West after ancient Greece as well as its decline after the Enlightenment, and science will be able to explain how intuitionism caused both the rise and fall of its culture because what physicists discover when they trigger a scientific revolution will also enable science to explain how consciousness is part of the natural world. This explanation reveals the illusion inherent in consciousness, and the key to explaining Western civilization is discounting the illusion of intuitionism and using it to explain how consciousness allows language-using brains that exchange metaphysical arguments to cause the kind of cultural evolution that occurred in Western civilization. [This scientific explanation is tricky because it runs contrary to what we all naturally assume. It requires us to distinguish between consciousness (as phenomenal properties that are immediately present) and reflection (as what a language-using brain can know about the brain states causing its behavior by representing them as causes as part of the process of causing it) and to recognize that

consciousness is not the efficient cause of any event but merely helps constitute what happens in the brain.]

But the discovery of the cause of the metaphysical stage will give us knowledge that pre-Socratics as well as metaphysicians would recognize as perfect because it will turn science into a cognitive power that naturalists and metaphysicians will both recognize as Reason. Parts of consciousness are what intuitionistic metaphysicians mean by Appearance and Reason, so ontological scientists will find themselves knowing Reality behind Appearance. But since science uses the empirical method to discover the first cause, they will insist that their cognitive power be called naturalistic Reason (or natReason, for short). The certainty of this knowledge will not come from a faculty of rational intuition but, rather, from discovering that an explanation of everything that leaves no grounds on which a refutation can be founded. It will be universally accepted because science is empirical knowledge and everyone will know that their beliefs are true by how they correspond to the natural world where they find their bodies. It will explain goodness as an essential aspect of the nature of life, and since that will show that beings like us have a spiritual nature by virtue of being parts of a form of life on a level of organization higher than multicellular animals (known as societies), we will know why we ought to be moral. NatReason will solve the hard problem of mind because it will show that language-using brains that exchange metaphysical arguments while falling for the intuitionistic illusion inherent in consciousness eventually conjure up a phantom Reality called mind. It will even explain the divine by showing that the world itself has all the perfections attributed to the Judeo-Christian God except for creating the natural world from outside space and time.

This is a very abbreviated rendition of a long argument, but the argument as a whole is simple and complete enough to show the

possibility that a deeper cause of both the Enlightenment and endarkenment will eventually vindicate the Western belief in Reason. Perhaps, you will see it in the difference you found between liberals and conservatives before you took up social media. The complete argument is presented in a trilogy, called Naturalistic Reason, that I am self-publishing as I send you this message, and it is presented in enough detail that, if it is on the right track, it will cause the scientific revolution it predicts. The first volume, Unification of Physics, shows how interactions of space and matter explain all the laws of physics in quantitative detail. The second volume, the Unification of Science, shows how the reduction of physics to spatio-materialism reveals a kind of efficient cause, not recognized by physics, called geometrical causes, and shows how specialized sciences use it to explain the regularities they study completely enough to discover that evolution brings beings like us into existence on suitable planets throughout the universe. The third volume, the Unification of Science and Philosophy, explains how consciousness is part of a world constituted by matter and space and uses the illusion inherent in it to show that Western civilization is a distinct stage in the evolution of life caused by the exchange of metaphysical arguments that culminates in the Second Enlightenment.

You will be skeptical of this prediction because it sounds too good to be true. But in my view, considering this argument is worth the effort because you are fighting endarkenment, and seeing your work exposing effects of social media in this context will make you better able to see what needs to be done. You will be seen by those looking back a decade or two from now as helping keep the we treasure inherited from the Enlightenment from slipping away, and knowing how the genius behind the Enlightenment will eventually be restored may help you restore it.

Since you will wonder about anyone who seriously asks you to consider such an unlikely argument, let me say something about myself and its origin. I have been working on this argument, pretty much on my own, for over 45 years, while teaching philosophy at American University for 30 years and since retiring from teaching over 20 years ago. As a philosopher, I have written this argument with a care that justifies expecting it to stand up under such scrutiny. There may be incomplete or mistaken arguments in it. But I am confident that the discovery that space is a substance that interacts with matter will eventually cause the scientific revolution I predict, and I am prepared to defend it on all fronts. My reason for writing you and a few others is to make what I have discovered public. I am about to turn 83, and I believe that it is my duty to tell others about my discoveries because my society has given me the leisure and privilege to enjoy a life spent in such an exceedingly meaningful way.

Even to those who believe in the rational pursuit of truth, the prospect of reading a detailed all-inclusive explanation of the natural world in three volumes is daunting, so I am offering an easier way of learning more about it. An executive summary of the argument is presented in a short (150 page) book titled *Sapere Aude* that I am also self-publishing now. I am including a free Amazon link to an eBook version of it. (See below.) And there is more information about this argument at natReason.com, including an introduction to the trilogy, a Table of Contents for it, a bookstore, and more information about me. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and very grateful to learn about any problems that you think may cast doubt on it. You can reach me personally at philliphscibner@yahoo.com.