

Ferber Response

I find this essay in the current Atlantic to be spot on, well describing the circumstances in which we, the American public, find ourselves. It blames the messy incoherence, and possible imminent societal collapse on our own stupidity, the prominence of our cognitive bias, encouraged and propagated by social media, to which we are sorrowfully addicted, and by which we are fully disoriented, distressed and without the means of a solution. There is a recent conversation between Haidt and Yuval Harari on You Tube which shows two of the best minds on this particular congruence of topics--psychology, social media, sociology, decision making and technology--and although the conversation is brilliant and entertaining, there is not a solution in sight. Haidt offers some technical suggestions, but technical change is so fast (eg: Elon Musk) there is no time, ability or motivation to improve social media conversation effectively. Everybody is so delirious insulting others, the attempt at factual exchange seems quaintly obsolete.

The main problem, in my opinion, is that we, the users of social media, are the product (Harari). And, because the human pleasure/pain principle is more chemical or emotional, than reasoned, the ability to have a critical understanding of any political or social controversy is greatly diminished. The business models of Twitter and Facebook are totally designed to keep us on the screen and clicking away as long as possible. More extreme views are more attractive to our biased consciousness, so we have self divided into extreme groups and the moderates are the enemy. This destroys democracy. Tristan Harris, considered the conscience of Silicon Valley, has narrated a documentary called The Social Dilemma in which he describes Facebook's business plan and as a purveyor of misinformation, encouraging addiction for "likes". These "opinions" travel at such break-neck speed, that the ability of the human mind to respond in any rational way is impossible. Hence, stupidity rules.

Happy Mother's Day to all

Anne