

Book Reviews

philosophy, and thus also of faith and unbelief” (p. 135). While positivism has since fallen as the prevailing philosophy governing natural science, Bavinck’s critique is still a welcome point, laying to rest the conception of science as an objective, neutral space, as opposed to theological and liberal arts disciplines.

The alternative to positivism may appear to be subjectivism. But rather than abandoning all hope in the face of apparent subjectivism, Bavinck recognizes that the extent of the influence worldview has on scholarship varies by discipline. He says, “In math, chemistry, [and] anatomy, the difference in life view may count for little; as soon as subjects like geology, paleontology, biology, [and] anthropology come into view, faith and unbelief lay their weight on the scales. This comes to the fore to a greater degree in the humanities” (p. 138–39). Such recognition is instructive to all who may be tempted to reject the natural and social sciences altogether merely because they have presuppositions.

The influence of worldview on science, according to Bavinck, is the source of much of the dispute between science and religion. One’s worldview can lead scientists to hold onto hypotheses long after they are deemed untenable. “History is abundantly rich in examples in which the so-called undisputable results of science were played against religion and which, after a short period of growth, were themselves rejected after scientific advancement and fell into obscurity” (p. 137).

To his credit, Bavinck covers a vast terrain of scholarship in his book. However, certain discussions felt wanting. For instance, he says regarding a miracle, “. . . it is in no way in conflict with the facts and methods of natural and historical science, because it leaves them fully intact and is itself, by virtue of its nature, withdrawn from the judgment of these sciences” (p. 202). A reader seeking a fuller exploration of the relation of miracles to the natural sciences shall not find it in this book. Indeed, given Bavinck’s expansive definition of science, the reader may approach the book with different questions concerning Christianity’s relationship to scientific discovery from the answers the book supplies.

The relation of Christianity to science developed within this book is also a manifesto for Bavinck who ends his book by arguing for a distinctly Christian higher education. He contends for state support of Christian universities and not merely of secular ones, for no university can be truly unbiased. He also sees the Christian confession of the Christian university to be beneficial to scholarship—the confession offers guardrails to practitioners within the university and accounts for the noetic effects of sin. In addition, the confession compels Christian universities to stay up to date with science “precisely

because they take up a position in the field of science” (p. 217).

Throughout his book, Bavinck helps Christians engaged in higher learning grasp a vision of the relation between Christianity and scholarship. Christianity is the greatest motivation in the pursuit of truth because it presumes the unity of all truth in a world created by God. Even in this day and age, *Christianity and Science* remains relevant for Christian scholars. For Bavinck is not merely concerned with fitting faith into the ever-changing landscape of science. Rather, he locates the place of science in a world known through faith—an endeavor that shall always remain relevant.

Reviewed by Kevin Valson Jacob (assistant professor of physics at Wheaton College, IL) and Skyler Flowers (PhD student at the University of Aberdeen and associate program director at The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics).

TECHNOLOGY

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THE ANXIOUS GENERATION: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness by Jonathan Haidt. Penguin, 2024. 400 pages. Hardcover; \$30.00. ISBN: 9780593655030.

“They don’t make ‘em like they used to.” That old saying came to mind more than once as I read Haidt’s masterful new book, about how significant changes to American childhood in the last decade and a half have led to a recent explosion in depression, anxiety, and other “internalizing” disorders, especially among those under the age of 30. Well-known social psychologist Haidt lays the blame for our national decline in mental health squarely at the feet of technology, in an account that Christian scholars (and parents) working in a variety of scientific fields will find compelling.

The Anxious Generation succeeds on many levels. It is well researched, well written, and persuasive. It provides specific and actionable recommendations for parents, educators, and legislators: no smartphones before high school, no social media before age 16, phone-free schools, and more unsupervised play and childhood independence. It attempts to start a thoughtful conversation at the national level about a problem that affects every American family individually, but that will require collective action to solve.

Haidt also shows, in a way scientists might appreciate, that life is never a well-controlled experiment. The sheer number of variables is mind-boggling. The rise of screens has been bad for children—yes, that much many parents and teachers have known for a while, intuitively.

But Haidt does more than just prove that their intuitions were correct. He also adeptly demonstrates that the rise of screens has been connected to many other developments in American life and culture, from mounting anxieties about “stranger danger” and the legal liability of playgrounds, to the erosion of norms and rites of passage in a society characterized by pluralism and consumerism. The rise of screens has also been the fall of play, in all of its many forms, and a precipitous drop in real-time, face-to-face encounters with other human beings. Unfortunately, those two things – play and face-to-face encounters – are precisely how children learn.

In short, *The Anxious Generation* is a book about far more than just keeping smartphones out of the hands of children and adolescents until high school. The story of how screens and social media are affecting young people today is tangled and complicated.

One consequence of this tangled, complex reality is that some causes have become very, very far removed from their effects. To give one example, Haidt cites five studies measuring the effect of high-speed internet roll-out on adolescent mental health. In all five, the arrival of high-speed internet was followed by an increase in diagnoses and hospitalizations for behavioral and mental health problems, especially among teenaged girls. One can only assume that the men and women who dug trenches for fiber-optic cables in Spain had no way of knowing that their labors would go on to harm the young men and women around them – perhaps even their own children (p. 150).

CEOs, by contrast, did know. Sean Parker, the first president of Facebook, told a reporter for Axios in 2017 that the platform had been specifically designed to exploit “a vulnerability in human psychology.” Executives and engineers “understood this consciously. And we did it anyway,” Parker admitted. “God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains” (p. 227).

And, we might add, what it’s doing to children’s souls. Although Haidt was raised in a secular Jewish household and now considers himself an atheist, he includes a chapter on “Spiritual Elevation and Degradation.” His diagram of “three dimensions of social space” – which plots Closeness on the x axis, Hierarchy on the y axis, and Divinity on the z axis – was not the easiest for me to follow, as a reader whose scholarly training is in American literature. But his analysis struck me as sound. To the extent that our phones pull us “downward” on this graph, Haidt writes, “spiritual harm” is occurring. And “if more people are spending more time below zero on the z axis,” then “we would perceive a general society-wide degradation that would be hard to put into words” (p. 201). As, indeed, many of us are.

Ultimately, *The Anxious Generation* is an eloquent delineation of the cultural, societal, and technological conditions that are most conducive to shaping a moral human person from birth to adulthood. Children need to take on responsibility and risk incrementally, in age-appropriate ways. They need real-life experiences from which to learn, practice, and refine their abilities. They need ample time with parents (who can nurture them and model appropriate behaviors) and with friends (who can, through improvised games and hours of talking and playing, become sparring partners who help them discern what is appropriate and safe, and what is not, in conversations in school, on the playground, and every other place that children and adults go).

What children too often get now, instead, is time alone on the Internet. Although virtual worlds might seem safer than physical spaces, Haidt makes it clear that they are not. He compares the online environment to Mars. Like astronauts in protective gear in the airless vacuum of outer space, children today lack opportunities for developing their natural “anti-fragile” properties, which are designed to strengthen living creatures by exposing them to moderate challenges (as with wind-ried “stress wood” or our immune systems). Like astronauts, children may find that under such hostile conditions even a single small mistake can be fatal.

Most unsettling to me was the way in which this shift to online childhood has proceeded in a manner at once systematic and haphazard. Tech companies have methodically sought ways to “hack” our human need for connection and belonging to improve their bottom line. The development of “advertising-driven apps” between 2008 and 2013 set companies off on an arms race “to see who could hold onto eyeballs the longest” (p. 115). The invention of the “like” button by Facebook and the “retweet” button by Twitter, both in 2009, “quantified the success of every post and incentivized users to craft each post for maximum spread,” which led to increasingly “extreme” content designed to produce strong (and usually negative) emotional responses (p. 117). Next came push notifications, front-facing cameras, autoplay, infinite scroll; all with the same effect of keeping eyes glued to screens. The road to hell is paved with shareholder profits and minor software tweaks. The veneer of good intentions is gone.

Meanwhile, on the user end, it’s a different story. Parents and young people alike speak of feeling “trapped and powerless,” as if they’d lost all human agency without knowing how (p. 23). Now, thanks to Haidt, we know how. All of this reveals that the conditions forming children today are far removed from the wisdom of Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” The

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question posted by *The Anxious Generation* is: what, if anything, are we willing to do about it?

Reviewed by Cassandra Nelson, visiting fellow in literature at the Lumen Center, Madison, Wisconsin, and associate fellow of the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.

Letter

Comments on Wood's Unification Paradigm

I just completed reading the article by W. Robert Wood, entitled "The Unification Paradigm in Theoretical Physics and the Beauty of God" (*PSCF* 77, no. 2 [June 2025]: 82–96). My professional background in physics makes the topic of special interest to me. Unification theories are at the heart of physical sciences.

Robert Wood has done a comprehensive study in preparing the article and has done it well. I have two comments.

The first involves the story behind the quote from Eugene Wigner, "the miracle of the appropriateness of the language of mathematics for the formulation of the

laws of physics is a wonderful gift which we neither understand nor deserve" (p. 88). As a graduate student at Princeton, I was taking a course in quantum mechanics from Wigner. He made that well-documented quote first in the classroom, shocking all of us. It was later published in 1960.¹

Second, Sy Garte published a brief version of one such unification principle I had made ("Four Forces in Nature," *God & Nature* [Fall 2022], <https://godandnature.asa3.org/touryan-four-forces.html>), regarding the four fundamental forces of nature: the electromagnetic force, the strong force, the weak force, and the gravitational force. The weak forces and strong forces are united, but the gravitational forces could not be captured. The point I raised was from Hebrews 1:3 NIV: "Jesus ... sustaining [unifying] all things by his *powerful word*"; hence, the unification of *all* four forces becomes evident for the scientist who also takes scripture seriously.

Note

¹Eugene Wigner, "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," *Communications on Pure and Applied Mathematics* 13, no. 1 (February 1960), 1–14, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cpa.3160130102>.

Cheers,

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WINTER SYMPOSIUM

"Role of Worship in Virtue & Character Development"

ONLINE EVENT

Saturday
January 24, 2026
1 pm EST / 10 am PST

