

[Opinion](#) \_ [George F. Will](#) \_ *Washington Post*, April 3, 2026

5 The most sinister idea in modern politics has received a California jury’s endorsement, and much applause. It contradicts democracy’s foundational belief in individual agency. This concept presupposes that individuals can, in common parlance, “make up their minds.” They can assemble and edit their beliefs and convictions. As Congress did when banning Chinese-owned TikTok, ostensibly for “national security” reasons.  
10 For the first time, Congress targeted a specific speech forum because of conjectural harms that might result from it.

The California jury weighed the claims of a now 20-year-old woman who began using YouTube at age 6 and Instagram when 9. She says her many emotional and social problems were caused not by her troubled family life but by those platforms.  
15 The jury agreed with her claims. It said, confusingly, that Meta and Google were negligent *and* deliberate in designing algorithms and other devices that make the platforms’ content “addictive. The Social Media Victims Law Center will now no doubt facilitate a tsunami of litigation more lucrative than coherent.

20 Many beneficial technologies and popular social developments are misused by small portions of their users. People drive aggressively, consume alcohol excessively and gamble recklessly. Fast-food chains profit from heavy — in several senses — users. Some people derive from such behaviors pleasure so powerful that their brain chemistry causes in them supposedly irresistible cravings for dangerous repetitions. Medicalizing this by terming it “addiction” gives a scientific patina to what is a  
25 contestable political-philosophical stance of helplessness.

The plaintiff blamed large corporations for her adolescent sadness. Such blaming flows from this toxic idea: Individual agency is so flimsy and attenuated that accountability for an individual’s behavior must be located beyond the individual. This is infantilizing. If human beings are soft wax, passively shaped by the promptings  
30 of the culture in which they are situated, then controlling the culture becomes an imperative and encompassing political project. Government must guarantee the wholesomeness, as government defines this, of everything said, read, heard, thought and taught.

35 A few years ago, a Senate committee approved legislation empowering government officials to force social media platforms to remove material that could “harm” minors. Harm, however, has become an elastic and metastasizing concept: Minors are said to be harmed by content that makes them “anxious.” Reducing the anxiety of adolescents will keep government busy. (405 words)