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Jordan Peterson. *Twelve Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. London: Allen Lane, 2018.

Jordan Peterson, a practicing clinical psychologist and a professor at the University of Toronto, has attained notoriety by speaking out against the social agendas promoted by minority identity groups. He considers them to be detrimental to the mental health of individuals and society, particularly when they pass into law. Drawing on his study of authoritarianism and thirty years' experience in professional practice, he seeks to define the causes of the "chaos" or "poison" in present society.

Peterson sees human activity in terms of an antithesis between chaos and order, two fundamental aspects of lived experience. He analyzes the reasons for the present chaos then suggests ways they can be countered. He posits that ordering principles, standards, and values are needed from childhood to provide a framework for human flourishing. He explores the trends of postmodernism from the loss of belief systems to present group-centered dysphoria. The tyranny of ideas promoted by militant minorities herds

people into "tribes" of conflicting ideological belief systems, with the result that different groups become unintelligible to each other.

Order is a known territory within which things happen according to expectations; the ancient hierarchy of place, position, and authority is a shared code that allows for cooperation in society. The longer an order has lasted, the more it is "natural" (14). According to Peterson's evolutionist ideas, the hierarchical configuration of male and female has been in existence for a billion years, parent and child for 200 million years: these are "the vital and fundamental parts of the environment to which we have adapted" (39). They are not arbitrary sociocultural constructions of capitalism or patriarchy. The past is a gift from our ancestors: it is reasonable to do what people have always done. Life is too short to work everything out for ourselves.

It is dangerous to overthrow time-tested values when there is no consensus on the criteria for a new order. Today, traditions are being deconstructed to accommodate vigorous, vocal minorities, even if there is no evidence that this will bring about improvement. He denounces the "insane incomprehensible postmodern insistence that all gender differences are socially constructed" (314) and highlights the "crisis of masculinity" (Rule 11) in the new social disorder, which considers male oppression as being guilty of having unearned privileges. Robbing men of their "manishness" can have only negative results.

Chaos is "unexplored territory" entering a predictable world, bringing instability in its wake. It is the "dreadful freedom" of the unfamiliar (35). Even where there is order, "chaos lurks beneath the surface" (268). Traditional values are overthrown by blind conformity to new "dictates," leaving in their wake a disordered universe with no evident objective rules. However, if order is important for achieving security, it is dangerous when it goes to excesses. There must be a balance between order and chaos: man needs to step outside the known to explore the unknown and discover.

This book is neither an autobiography nor a testimony, but Peterson's personal beliefs show through. He speaks of his disillusionment with both the "shallow Christianity" he grew up with and the left-wing politics he later embraced. He uses historical evidence to expose the shortcomings of the Marxist mindset of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Paul Sartre and the totalitarianism of "single-cause interpretations and those that purvey them" (311). He also respects Taoism's balance in the struggle between order and chaos and sees the value of religion for ethics. As an agnostic, Peterson has a disjointed view of the God of the Bible, cobbled together from various sources: Charles Darwin, Carl Jung, Friedrich Nietzsche, René Descartes, and Christian existentialism. It is absurd, he says, to posit that the judgmental deity of the Old Testament and the loving God of the New Testament

are the same (107), and he explores the question as to how we can believe in an all-good God after the horrors of twentieth-century totalitarianism (105, 346).

Peterson speaks out against academia, a world he knows well, for promoting political action of a particular kind driven by a destructive, nihilistic philosophy whose agenda undermines the very culture that finances it. Young people are taught "unsupported ideologically-predicated theories about the nature of men and women—or the nature of hierarchy" (314). This amounts to indoctrination in leftist radicalism unwittingly propped up by the state. There is no reason, he says, that people teaching these ideas should have any claim to public funding (313). If radical conservative ideas were to be so blatantly peddled, masquerading as university courses and financed by the state, it would cause outrage.

Christianity gets a fair hearing and a mostly positive evaluation, even if it is a "single-cause interpretation." Christian doctrine "elevates the individual soul" (186); men and women are metaphysically of equal importance before God. Many of the positive changes in our society over the last two millennia, such as the abolition of slavery and the raising of women's status, both unthinkable in the ancient world, were driven by Christianity, although this is forgotten. The Bible is, "for better or worse, the foundational document of Western Civilisation (of Western values, Western morality, and Western conceptions of good and evil)" (104, 53). The whole Bible, after the fall, is a "remedy for that Fall, a way out of evil," pointing the way to the Messiah (57). Although Peterson does not view it as a revelation given by a coherent God sovereign over the creation, he grants psychological credence to the Bible's archetypal "stories" as age-old wisdom (53) thrown up out of the collective imagination (10), and he repeatedly refers to them. He presents the Genesis narrative as a credible psychological explanation for man's condition, order and life, chaos and death, sin, work, suffering, shame and guilt, self-consciousness, neurosis, and fear of the truth. The analysis of faith and religion points out that these sum up man's dilemma in a world full of tragedy.

Peterson is lucid as to the condition of the human heart. He speaks in strong terms of "cowardice, malevolence, resentment and hatred," and the "evil triad" of arrogance, deceit, and resentment. He describes human beings as "naked, ugly, ashamed, frightened, worthless, cowardly, resentful, defensive, accusatory" with a capacity for wrongdoing. The propensity for evil is in the soul of every human being. Man is unique in the animal kingdom because we can not only be hurt and feel terror, horror, and disgust, but also willfully inflict pain, and we alone are fully aware that one day we

will die. This sounds almost like "original sin." Peterson seems to grasp the notion that man is "fallen," but it is not clear what from. Our awareness of our true nature has a sting in its tail, however, in that it makes us doubt our self-worth (53); this has to be countered by limiting the chaos in our lives, setting ourselves on the right track.

Despite his lucidity, Peterson has an optimistic view of human nature. He believes we can consciously work to make things better. To progress, our negative attitudes and behavior must be dealt with, and making the world a better place starts with oneself. Man and woman have the capacity to bring order out of chaos, according to the Genesis account (56). We can even look to Christ as a prototype, a model to follow (180). Christ's sacrifice is exemplary, not redemptive and cosmic. There is no metaphysical freedom from sin, no new birth, or new life. Rather, we are called on to do as Christ did, sacrifice what we love best to ensure future prosperity. However, as merely a "model for honorable man," not divine revelation, the Bible is emptied of its real meaning.

There is some value in religion as a basis for ethics. "Religion is about proper behavior" (102). No one can act as if there were no God, as if they were free to do whatever they liked. An innate sense of guilt is useful in restraining the worst excesses of psychopathy (55). Religion is the highest in a hierarchy of values, it would seem, a source of justice, guilt, and mercy, and therefore useful for preserving social values. Faith is "the realisation that the tragic irrationalities of life must be counterbalanced by an equally irrational commitment to the essential goodness of being" (107). All this is a pretty warmed up mess of liberal theological pottage.

Although "antidote" suggests a remedy, Peterson does not claim his rules will "cure" anyone. What exactly does Peterson propose in his commonsensical "rules"? Setting goals, pursuing what is meaningful, trying to set things right, adopting and following structures: all these make people and society better. People come to their senses when they realize that far from being victims, they are in part responsible for the mess their lives are in because of their choices. Individual responsibility has been eliminated from postmodern social agendas, and values need reinstating.

This is challenging, but does it ring true? It is hard to see how people floundering in disordered lives could leap from the depths of chaos to the heights of a better, ordered world: what could motivate them, or enable them? This optimism fits into an evolutionary worldview (52) and the will of the organism to mutate. It verges on irrationality and blind optimism in our ability to better ourselves. But man is alone in an unforgiving universe, there is no God to whom we are accountable, no basis for what is good

and what is evil, and any values we invent are necessarily arbitrary and subjective. There is very little light at the end of the tunnel of chaos.

Peterson writes in a mixture of styles: technical, conversational, and humorous, writing more for his media following than for fellow psychologists. The argument is dense at times, backed by scholarly references and interdisciplinary analyses; the book is also peppered with a string of anecdotes and illustrations drawn from case studies and family experiences. Peterson comes over as a person of integrity, a man with the courage of his convictions and unpopular views on the dangers of postmodern social conformity.

Why would a Christian read this book? A self-confessed "classic British liberal," Peterson gives an in-depth analysis of society that is useful, even though—and maybe for this very reason—his ideas are based on presuppositions antithetic to Christian ones. You could say he has been touched by the common grace afforded to unregenerate persons to see problems and gain understanding. Peterson can help hone critical Christian understanding of the ravages of postmodern radicalism. It would be good to hear him out, to thank him, and also to pray for him particularly in light of the attacks he has suffered from the woke.

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