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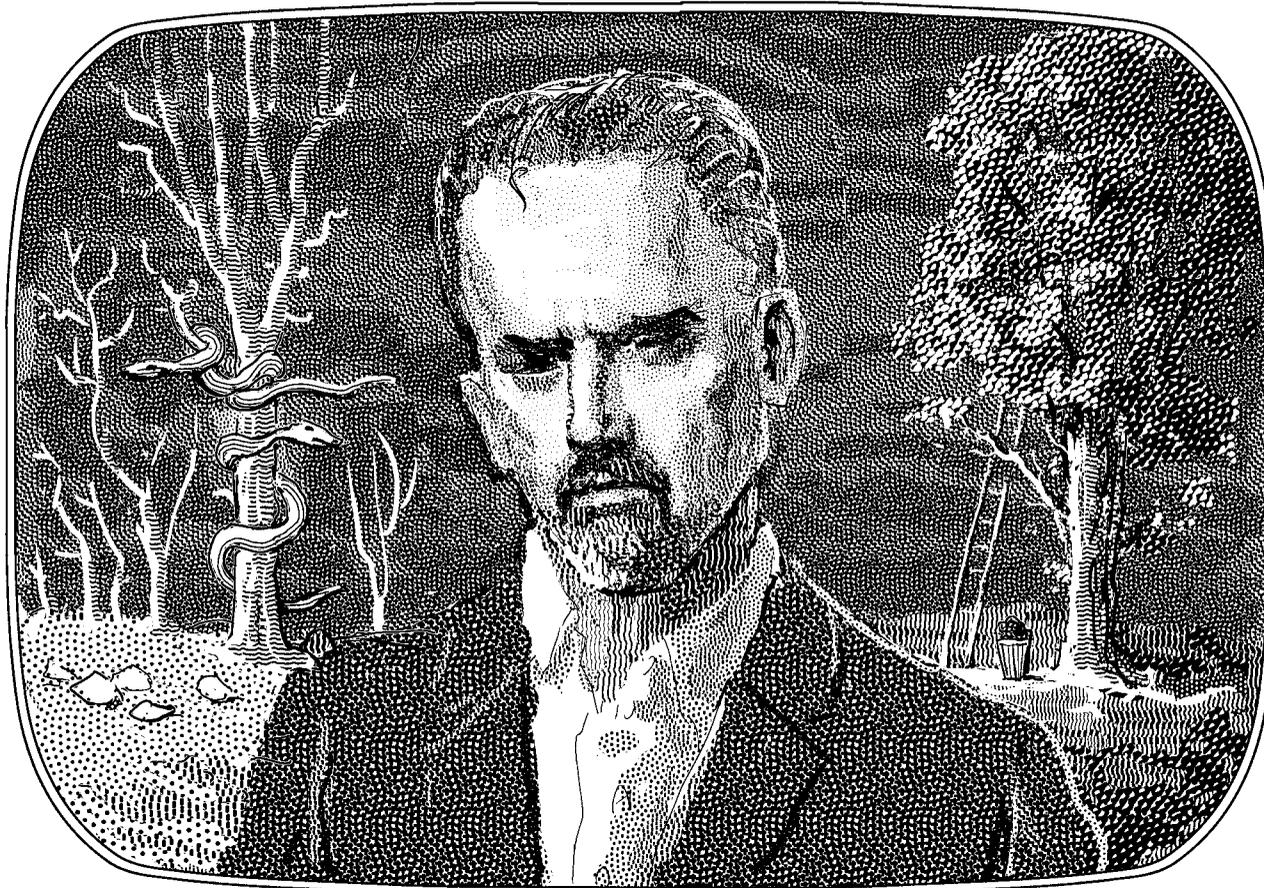
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Essay by Glenn Ellmers

## THE JORDAN PETERSON PHENOMENON



**L**ONG AFTER THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION launched our experiment in self-government, the tenuousness of civilization continued to define frontier life. Hollywood westerns captured this experience, memorably and even nobly. These movies “portrayed a world in which genuine heroes and therefore genuine villains were possible, where human and American virtues and vices contended in all seriousness,” John Marini wrote in these pages (“There Once Were Giants,” Spring 2001). By probing “the deepest tensions in modern conceptions of the human condition or human happiness,” these movies “confronted the fundamental questions of politics.”

Though Jordan Peterson is not an American, his work takes up these same fundamental issues, familiar yet still unsettled. Indeed, it is not wrong to consider Peterson in connection with the cowboys of the Old West. “I come from northern Alberta, I come from the frontier,” he says, describing it as “kind of a rough place.” Peterson’s hometown, Fair-

view, “was scraped out of the bloody prairie 50 years before I lived there.” His earnest demeanor and forthright way of speaking attest that a doctorate in clinical psychology and tenure at the University of Toronto have not erased the frontier’s influence. (See the sidebar on the facing page for an outline of his life and career.)

Peterson’s lessons for helping people make their way in the world, outlined in the best-selling *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, published in January, can be as gritty as anything uttered by John Wayne or Clint Eastwood: find your burden and carry it; stand up straight with your shoulders back; tell the truth...or, at least, don’t lie. But what Peterson is attempting goes beyond campfire aphorisms, beyond even the academic skirmishes that first launched him to fame. As a result of his book and extensive collection of lectures on YouTube, he has become a phenomenon, in part because he has a project—or rather, a mission. Like a lawman on the plains, he represents something larger than himself.

### End of an Age

**T**O APPRECIATE PETERSON’S POPULARITY fully, one must look at the massive social and political transformation underway as America’s 75-year-old Age of Television draws to a close. Its demise is closely related to the collapse of the liberal establishment’s “Blue Church”—a metaphor popularized by Jordan Greenhall’s essays on Medium.com. Greenhall, a tech entrepreneur with a law degree, explains the 2016 election as a “revolutionary war” that saw the end of television as a centralized, top-down method for reinforcing a dominant moral-political “narrative”—a set of authoritative customs that have defined American culture. Television powerfully reflected and enforced liberalism’s quasi-religious authority, respectability, and expertise—a process thoughtfully explicated by another Canadian, Marshall McLuhan.

The ascendant digital media, unlike television, are dynamic, decentralized, and interactive. Their veneer of anonymity encourages



disdain for traditional authority. Television had been the preeminent pulpit of the Blue Church liberal establishment, which includes much of the Republican Party's country-club wing. Donald Trump and his supporters represent a red-state insurgency that uses digital media—and more haphazardly, the powers of the White House—to try to overthrow the old establishment, including the administrative state. “The old weapons have no more sting,” Greenhall writes. “The collapse of the Blue Church is going to lead to a level of ‘cultural flux’ that will make the 1960s look like the Eisenhower administration.”

The crumbling of the liberal establishment's moral orthodoxy is superintended by the nation's first exuberantly anti-P.C. president. Of course, the U.S. has been through worse political crises in the past. Even as recently as the 1960s, radical protests and violence—including riots, bombings, and kidnappings—seemed to threaten our constitutional order more than today's political correctness does. Some, therefore, might consider Greenhall's apocalyptic warnings to be overwrought.

Jordan Peterson, however, is deeply worried. “There's a reasonable possibility that things are going to go very wrong, very soon... for all of us,” he remarked in one video interview. “We're playing with fire.” With the centrist accord on what constitutes respectable opinion falling apart—especially on the most sensitive issues of race and sex—political extremists at both poles are rushing to stake new claims. The “alt-right” sees itself as a new counterculture, gleefully embracing a shock-and-awe strategy to leverage digital vulgarity. Meanwhile, the zealous Left on and off campus has beaten the plowshares of postmodern views on identity and social construction into swords for tribal warfare.

For calling out the resultant anti-intellectualism, such eminent men of the Left as Noam Chomsky, Stanley Fish, and Steven Pinker find themselves attacked as enemies of the new progressivism. In *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (reviewed by Edward Feser on page 68), which has been sharing the bestseller list with *12 Rules*, Pinker deplores the irrationalism of the regressive Left, and seems to accept or even welcome his prospective excommunication from the Blue Church.

*Enlightenment Now* defends the Age of Reason and its heroes: Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and the other scientific conquistadors who gave us the New World. If the political center cannot hold, then perhaps—as Pinker suggests—scientific progress can provide surer ground for our comfort and safety. There is, of course, a great deal to be said for

modernity's achievements in medicine, technology, and democracy. *The Federalist* gamely notes that “the science of politics...has received great improvement.”

But there are deep questions about the underpinnings of modern science. The 20th century's greatest statesman, Winston Churchill, and greatest philosophic thinker, Leo Strauss, both doubted the utopian presumption that science could liberate mankind from all restraint and hardship. Churchill warned against the possibility of a new Dark Age, “made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.” Strauss observed that “while science has increased man's power in ways that former men never dreamt of, it is absolutely incapable of telling men how to *use* that power.”

One of Strauss's first students, Harry Jaffa, explained that modern rationalism sought “to discover premises that could not be doubted, and to proceed therefrom both inductively and deductively to conclusions that could not be doubted.” This would lead to the “ultimate transformation of philosophy into wisdom.” By confining wisdom to the world of objects that can be measured and manipulated, modern science tried to remove from sight and mind anything beyond this materialist focus—above all, the human soul.

But advances in quantum mechanics cast grave doubt on how well we can really understand the one thing science purports to grasp: matter, the substance held to be the source of all causes and recipient of all effects. As early as 1927 biologist J.B.S. Haldane came to suspect that the universe would prove to be “not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose.” Nature, with its quirks and quarks and charmed particles, appears far more mysterious and less manipulable than the Cartesian rationalists thought. Strange and indifferent, the universe would seem to offer no support to the ancient philosophers' aspiration for a cosmological ground of virtue; but neither does it anymore underwrite the modern desire for a natural predictability and lawfulness that could be counted on to help liberate mankind from necessity. Those seeking refuge from the chaos of politics will find little comfort in quantum indeterminacy.

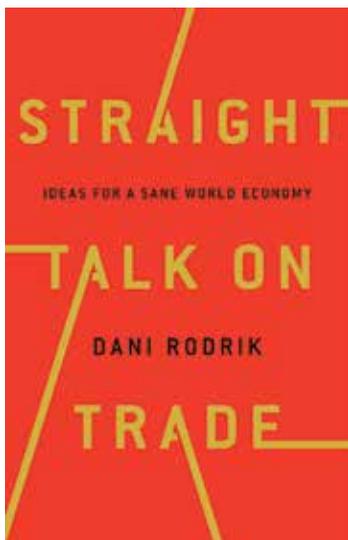
Peterson, like Strauss, sees the Enlightenment's utopian project as a dead end. “Prior to the time of Descartes, Bacon and Newton,” he wrote in his first book, *Maps of Meaning* (1999),

man lived in an animated, spiritual world, saturated with meaning, imbued with moral purpose. The nature of this purpose was revealed in the stories people told each other—stories about the

### The Jordan Peterson Phenomenon

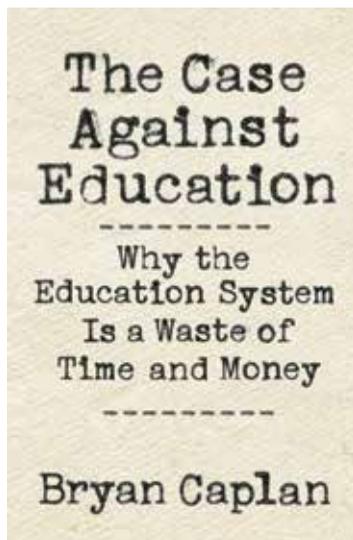
- Born, 1962; grew up in Fairview, Alberta (pop. 3,000).
- Enrolled at Grande Prairie Regional College in 1979 to study political science and English literature.
- Transferred to the University of Alberta, and received a B.A. in psychology in 1984.
- In 1985, moved to Montreal to attend McGill University and earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology under the supervision of Robert O. Pihl.
- Taught at Harvard University from 1993 to 1998 as an assistant and an associate professor in the psychology department.
- Returned to Canada in 1998 and took up a post as a full professor at the University of Toronto.
- Published *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* in 1999 (released as an audiobook in June 2018).
- Has authored more than 100 scientific papers in the fields of psychopharmacology and psychology (including abnormal, neuro-, clinical, personality, social, industrial and organizational, religious, ideological, political, and creativity).
- Began posting his lectures to YouTube in 2013; as of June 2018, had more than 300 videos, 1,250,000 subscribers, and 60 million views.
- Twitter: 740,000 followers; Jordan Peterson Subreddit: 65,000 subscribers; Jordan Peterson Study Group on Facebook: 8,000 members (as of June 2018).
- For most of his career, has maintained an active clinical practice, seeing 20 patients a week.
- Gained prominence in 2016 by opposing Canada's Bill C-16, a proposal to add “gender identity or expression” as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act.
- Placed his clinical practice on hold in 2017, and in 2018 temporarily stopped teaching because of new projects.
- Current book tour for *12 Rules for Life* has encompassed 45 cities in North America, Europe and Australia, reaching 100,000 people at live events, as of June 2018. Additional appearances are planned.

Sources: JordanBPeterson.com, Wikipedia, YouTube, Twitter, Reddit, Facebook.



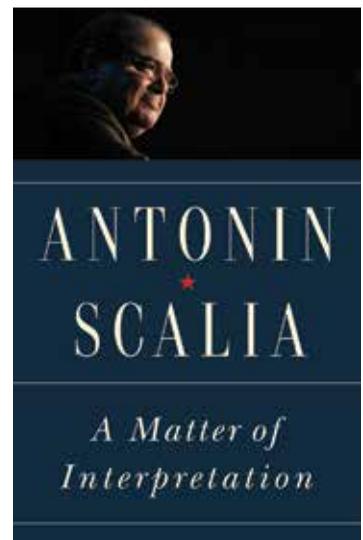
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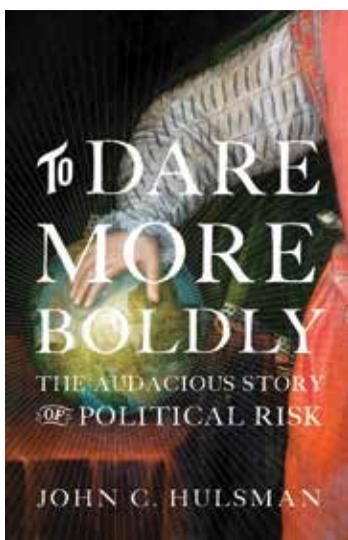
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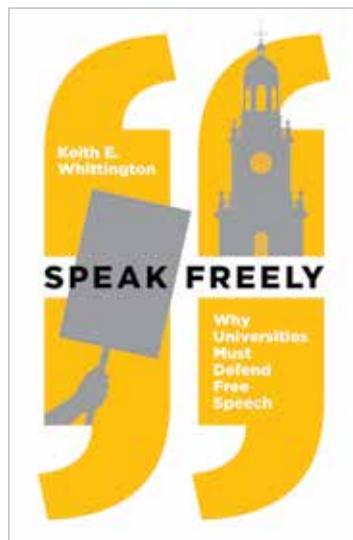
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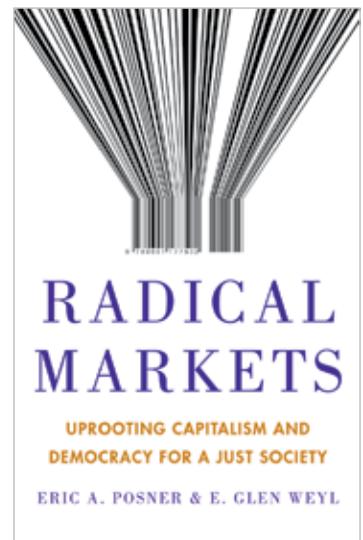
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—Kenneth S. Rogoff, author of *The Curse of Cash*

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structure of the cosmos, and the place of man. But now we think empirically (at least we think we think empirically), and the spirits that once inhabited the universe have vanished.

His project, which here departs significantly from Strauss, is to rehabilitate the wisdom of this pre-scientific understanding by melding together three modern approaches to find a non-arbitrary ground of spiritual meaning amid the dislocations of modern life. The moral framework he constructs, which resonates powerfully with his many admirers, combines neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and Jungian analytical psychology (drawing especially on the narrative tapestry of persistent human archetypes, based on ancient myths, that Carl Jung called our “collective unconscious”). This *mélange* is held together by Peterson’s pragmatic common sense, and a deep well of empathy formed by his years as a practicing psychologist treating patients.

### Boys Will Be Boys

**1** *2 RULES* (WITH A CHAPTER FOR EACH axiom or lesson, plus an “overture” and “coda”) shot to the bestseller list in part because Peterson was already well known for his lectures and interviews on YouTube. His intensity and erudition combine to produce an engaging speaking style; he was nominated for the Levenson Memorial Teaching Prize when he taught at Harvard in the mid-’90s. Much greater notoriety came in 2016 when he vociferously opposed Canada’s Bill C-16 and its guarantees for “gender identity and gender expression.” According to some of its critics, this law would make the failure to use an individual’s “preferred pronoun” into a hate crime. Peterson made clear that he would, as a matter of courtesy, address people however they wished, but would not submit to legal compulsion of his speech. This stand crystallized his long-standing opposition to academic postmodernism and what he calls “cultural Marxism,” whose influence he deplores repeatedly in his lectures and writings.

A few weeks before *12 Rules* was released, Peterson received an inadvertent, hilarious publicity boost from British journalist Cathy Newman. Throughout an interview for Britain’s Channel 4 TV, Newman proved unable to integrate Peterson’s reasonable, thoughtful statements with her stubborn image of him as a misogynistic bigot. Instead, she kept reformulating his arguments into something like their opposite, with the phrase (now a popular internet meme), “So, what you’re saying is....” The YouTube video

of the interview has become a cultural milestone, viewed more than 10 million times. At one point Peterson discusses how social-dominance hierarchies, far from being artificial constructs, run so widespread and deep in the evolutionary past that they can be observed in crustacea. The “nervous system of the lobster and the human being are so similar that antidepressants work on lobsters,” Peterson explained. “And it’s part of my attempt to demonstrate that the idea of hierarchy has absolutely nothing to do with socio-cultural construction, which it doesn’t.” Like that student who never shuts up in class but also never grasps the central point, Newman responded, “Let me get this straight. You’re saying that we should organize our societies along the lines of the lobsters?”

In fact, Peterson does not think humankind should resettle to the bottom of the ocean. He does, however, believe that we can’t ignore the way our behaviors and social interactions have been shaped by 2 million years of

#### Books discussed in this essay:

*12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*,  
by Jordan B. Peterson.  
Random House Canada,  
448 pages, \$25.95

*Maps of Meaning: The Architecture  
of Belief*, by Jordan B. Peterson.  
Routledge, 564 pages, \$160 (cloth),  
\$76.95 (paper)

evolutionary adaptation. In his battles against political correctness Peterson has been criticized for his lack of academic rigor in conflating Marxists, postmodern deconstructionists, and feminists. But *12 Rules* is not a study of leftist intellectual history, dissecting the finer differences between, say, Jacques Derrida and Simone de Beauvoir.

His intent is to refute all “blank slate” doctrines that deny our biological hard-wiring and teach the same disastrous lesson: humans are merely social artifacts with no inherent or evolved nature. From there it is but a quick step to insisting that any differences in abilities or interests leading to disparate outcomes are arbitrary and unjust, and that men and women are essentially the same. This last emphatically erroneous point is of particular concern to Peterson, because it is at the root of so much of the unhappiness he sees in his clinical practice; not to mention that a society incapable of supporting stable families and raising healthy, well-adjusted children won’t long survive.

Peterson has been dismissed as a men’s rights advocate, whose message is of little interest or relevance to women. And it’s true that his early online admirers were mostly male. (YouTube has—for whatever reason—a predominantly male viewership.) He likes to point out that this is changing, and attendance at his book tour lectures is much more evenly divided between men and women. Still, he does have special concern for young males, for the simple reason that elite opinion today largely ignores the problems of boys, and often regards natural displays of masculinity as “toxic.” Young men have a much trickier time navigating the shoals of acceptable behavior. As he points out:

Boys’ interests tilt towards things; girls’ interests tilt towards people. Strikingly, these differences, strongly influenced by biological factors, are most pronounced in the Scandinavian societies where gender equality has been pushed hardest: this is the opposite of what would be expected by those who insist, ever more loudly, that gender is a social construct. It isn’t. This isn’t a debate. The data are in....

Girls can win by winning in their own hierarchy—by being good at what girls value, as girls. They can add to this victory by winning in the boys’ hierarchy. Boys, however, can win only by winning in the male hierarchy. They will lose status, among girls and boys, by being good at what girls value.

Because our society makes it so hard for boys to find a respectable path to manhood without sacrificing their rambunctious and competitive nature, the arc of Peterson’s sympathy does bend a bit more toward justice for young men. But this focus, he argues, should be of interest to both sexes. Aren’t women, he likes to ask, interested in finding spouses who are mature, attentive, and reliable—virtues his rules are designed to cultivate? Presumably these qualities would be considered desirable even by the most enlightened women. But of course the whole premise of Peterson’s approach—helping young men to become appropriately strong and manly to make themselves attractive to women—is objectionable to feminism’s emphasis on systematic oppression and gender identity politics.

#### Ancient Wisdom

**P**ETERSON USES REFERENCES TO LOBSTERS, and other recurring bits of whimsy and humor, to leaven the severity of his lessons. *12 Rules* does not



shrink from telling readers that life means pain and suffering. His deft exposition, however, makes clear that duty is often liberating and responsibility can be a gift. A chapter called, “Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street,” is a beautiful meditation on imperfection, and the idea that “when you love someone, it’s not despite their limitations. It’s because of their limitations.” In the book and on his videos, Peterson sometimes argues against pursuing happiness, in the sense of pleasure or instant gratification. He makes clear elsewhere that he agrees with Aristotle that *eudaimonia*—the happiness of the well-lived life—is the true goal.

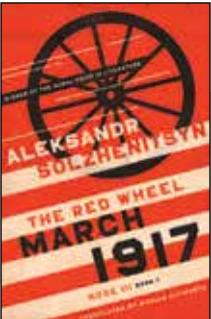
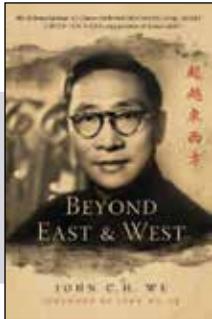
Other classical threads weave through the text, as when he recognizes that spiritedness, an elemental part of the soul, is important to both morality and politics. His advice is reliably sound (“make friends with people who want the best for you”), frequently clever (“a postmodern man is one whose moral virtue consists in his harmlessness”), and occasionally moving. He can sound tough—“young people are mostly worthless, because they don’t know anything”; “an unruly child brings disgrace on himself and his parents”—but it’s clear on every page, and even more so on video,

that he wants to help people who are lost, or ailing, to put their lives back together.

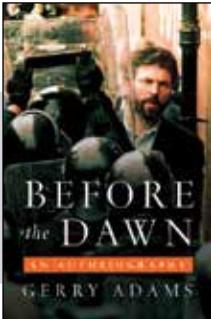
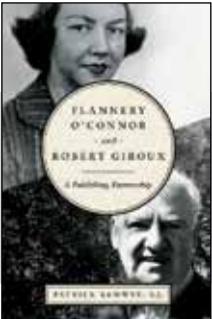
In a perceptive *Weekly Standard* review of *12 Rules*, Tanner Greer wrote that because Peterson is on a “quest to totalitarian-proof the Western world,” his target audience is civilization itself. Indeed, Peterson says he wants to immunize people against “ideological possession” by guiding readers away from extremism and toward a purposeful self-understanding that cultivates moderation, courage, and independent thinking. His enmity toward the alt-right has not gone unnoticed. Richard Spencer and his followers call him the “Cuck of Canuckistan,” even as leftists routinely assail him as a crypto-fascist. When people “sort themselves out,” Peterson says, they should become “dangerous,” meaning capable of harm but with the self-control that prevents it. Of course, the challenges to our psychic health include personal tragedy or trauma in addition to ideology. People are responding to Peterson’s message less to escape a monolithic, suffocating doctrine than because they believe there are *no* solid doctrines or authorities they can trust. *An Antidote to Chaos* seems especially welcome when the shadows on the cave’s wall no longer make sense.

Generally, the most insightful reviews of Peterson’s work are by believing Christians, who seem to welcome anyone with a sympathetic appreciation for the Bible. These reviewers acknowledge Peterson as an insightful interpreter of Scripture. (His online lectures on the Bible are among his most popular.) Yet Peterson sidesteps the question of whether he is himself a believing Christian, and hints that he is agnostic. Some critics refuse to accept Peterson’s half-loaf of Scripture without God. They conclude, with Friedrich Nietzsche among others, that there is no Christian morality without Christ. But Peterson is actually correct, without ever quite saying how, in suggesting that God and His Word *can* be understood separately, that it’s possible to see the Old Testament as one among many ancient stories, and yet somehow radically different. He sees the centrality of the Bible for Western civilization, but misses something essential.

In “Leo Strauss, the Bible, and Political Philosophy,” an essay published in 1991, Harry Jaffa explained that all the ancient cities claimed that their laws were of divine origin. In this sense, the Torah was like the stories of any other ancient city. But all other ancient

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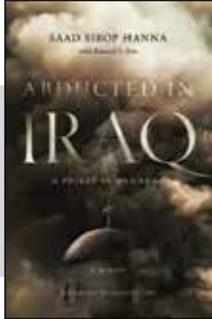
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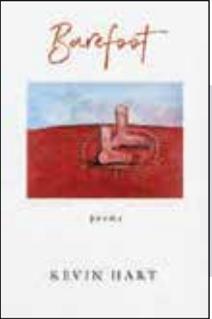
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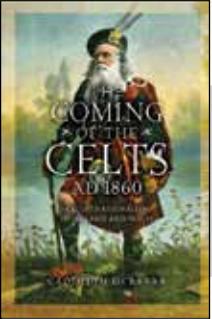
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cities were polytheistic. Only Judaism (and then Christianity) proclaims the “One God who is separate from the universe, of which he is the Creator.” Because the God of the Bible is “both separate and unique,” He is therefore unknowable. Jaffa elaborated on this in an exegesis of Deuteronomy 4:6-7, which reads:

Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.... And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?”

“Why,” Jaffa asked, “were the ‘peoples,’ i.e., the Gentiles, expected to say of the Israelites, that they were a ‘wise and understanding people?’ What in them enabled them to recognize wisdom and understanding[?]” The reason is that “wisdom is a human potentiality.” God endowed man with the capacity for reflection and choice, and thus we can discern that the laws of Moses are “righteous.” Do we not see in this passage from Deuteronomy, Jaffa asked, that in the Torah, “the teachings of reason and of revelation will not contradict each other, since both reason and revelation are God’s gifts to mankind?”

None of us is tempted to worship Marduk, Horus, or the other ancient deities Peterson discusses. Those gods died with their cities. Only the God of Israel—the God of both revelation and reason—could survive the destruction of ancient Israel. But because he is radically unknowable, belief in that God requires a leap of faith. Peterson—or anyone—can therefore find himself unable to make that leap, but nevertheless see in the Word of the Hebrew God the “wisdom and understanding” that makes the Bible unique.

### Blazing a Trail

CURIOSLY, PETERSON DOESN’T SEEM fully to appreciate the radical unknowability of the Biblical God, even though one of the key psychological insights throughout his work concerns how the human brain deals with uncertainty. Both the premise and title of *Maps of Meaning* indicate that we are constantly mapping our environment—physically, mentally, and emotionally. We confront, overcome, and occasionally succumb to never-ending assaults on our “familiar territory.” The rules by which we act, Peterson writes, constitute “the

most essential aspect of the social contract.” Within our clan or group, “patriotic rituals, stories of ancestral heroes, myths and symbols of cultural or racial identity,” define our “established territory, weaving for us a web of meaning that, shared with others, eliminates the necessity of dispute over meaning.” Long before the Age of Television and the collapse of the Blue Church, humans had established their psychological need for *nomoi*, authoritative opinions.

When we leave the familiar, Peterson explains, we tend to negotiate new or unexpected territory with a mixture of fear and cautious hope:

Appearance of the unknown motivates curious, hopeful exploratory behavior, regulated by fear.... The simultaneous production of two antithetical emotional states, such as those of hope and fear, means conflict.... We are protected from such conflict—from subjugation to instinctive terror—by...

## In Peterson’s idiosyncratic melding of myth, existentialism, and neuroscience, the truth is mysterious but somehow real.

culturally-determined beliefs, by the stories we share.

We can never ignore the new territory. Those who try—as well as those who can’t or won’t successfully manage the “instinctive terror”—become the broken and the wicked. Every healthy, well-developed psyche always lives, as it were, on the frontier. Peterson’s book is intended to help establish psychological order with justice, to provide a survival guide for life on the border between civilization and nature.

Every new territory, like every epic saga, needs a first settler, the trailblazer who decides voluntarily, courageously, to face some aspect of the still-unknown and threatening.... His “descent into the underworld” and subsequent reorganization makes him a savior—but his contact with the dragon of chaos also contaminates him with the forces that disrupt tradition and stability.... His

return to the kingdom of threatened order may hardly be accompanied by praise, however, since the information he now carries (or perhaps is) will appear disruptive and destructive long before it proves redemptive. It is very easy to view the hero as the most profound danger to the state.

Despite this account’s similarities to Socrates’ description of the philosopher in Plato’s *Republic*, the model that Peterson follows is neither Socrates nor Plato. He alludes here to Jungian archetypes of the hero and his emergence from, or rather through, self-doubt—a transformation popularized by Joseph Campbell and familiar to every *Star Wars* fan. But Peterson has deeper sources in mind, too. In his essay “Three Forms of Meaning and the Management of Complexity,” Peterson rejects “psychological models...based on the assumption that the world is made of objects, existing independently and given, or, more abstractly, of stimuli.” To the contrary, because people “live in a sea of complexity,” we “perceive *meaningful phenomena*, not the objective world.” This description of seeing the world pre-scientifically, as a place not of objects but of meaningful phenomena, derives fundamentally from Martin Heidegger and existentialism. Peterson calls himself an existentialist, in fact, and generously salts his book with references to “Being,” acknowledging his “exposure to the ideas of the 20th-century German philosopher.”

Thus in Peterson’s idiosyncratic—and likely problematic—melding of myth, existentialism, and neuroscience, the truth is mysterious but somehow real; it is both pre- and post-philosophic. From this murky well he nevertheless draws sensible advice and clear moral guidance.

Contrast his practical wisdom to the young and not-so-young technocrats who propose to create “Society 4.0” through computerized mechanisms and solutions, such as blockchain, crypto-currencies, digital crowdsourcing, and artificial intelligence. Some rather fanciful proposals for re-engineering society even draw explicitly on science fiction. More ominously, the enormous creativity and ingenuity in Silicon Valley have led some internet entrepreneurs to foresee the emergence of a superior “creator” class that will furnish the transfigurative ideas for society’s ultimate metamorphosis. Only a few, most notably Peter Thiel, seem to appreciate that while Asimov may fire our imaginations, it is still Aristotle who grounds us in reality.

The hubristic yet fanciful ideas of these keyboard legislators, seen alongside the Pe-



terson phenomenon, should prompt political philosophers to consider what role, if any, they intend to play in our unfolding political drama, and to reflect on why no book by one of their own has engaged the popular imagination in this way since Allan Bloom published *The Closing of the American Mind* 31 years ago. To the degree that Straussians, in particular, still care about American public opinion, it may be time to show that their political prudence—like Peterson’s—has room for scientific and technological literacy. A modest first step in this direction would be to reconsider Charles Darwin and evolution. (Peterson’s emphatic embrace of Darwinian evolution does not seem to have turned away any of his conservative or religious admirers, and it probably has helped to attract many to his arguments who are neither conservative nor religious.)

A number of Straussians, including Roger Masters, Ken Blanchard, and Larry Arnhart have argued for a more open-minded attitude toward evolution. Arnhart has even written a very compelling book, *Darwinian Natural Right* (1998). But they have met with either indifference or resistance from many of their colleagues, notwithstanding Strauss’s own comment in *Natural Right and History* (1953) that “however indifferent to moral distinc-

tions the cosmic order may be thought to be, human nature, as distinguished from nature in general, may very well be the basis of such distinctions.”

Almost alone among academic departments, biology—especially evolutionary biology—defends human naturalness and sociability, and thus opens a door to lead public opinion back to Aristotle’s acknowledgement of man as “the political animal.” With post-modernism now insisting not only on the social construction of gender, but even of biological sex—“Some men have a uterus,” a Planned Parenthood affiliate informed the world—evolutionary biologists deserve, and would profit from, modern Aristotelians’ insight and support.

### Spirited Engagement

**J**ORDAN PETERSON CONCLUDES AN ACADEMIC journal article with this quite non-academic call to spirited engagement:

Life is not the constant shrinking away from the terror of death.... It is that which keeps the spectre of mortality at bay, while we work diligently, creatively, at work whose meaning is so powerful and self-evident that the burden of ex-

istence seems well worth bearing. Terror management, be damned! The path of the eternal hero beckons, and it is a doomed and dangerous fool who turns his back on it.

In the public persona he has developed, Peterson clearly sees himself as a hero—inspiring welcome fortitude and self-discipline among his admirers. But his embrace of existentialism indicates that he may be more audacious than courageous. Political philosophers, for their part, need to admit that beyond their well-rehearsed arguments and well-thumbed books lie frontiers that demand exploration: the metaphysical challenges of modern physics, the new horizons of Aristotle’s empirical biology made richer with modern tools of discovery, and even the tumultuous potential of social media. In their ideal form, the lawmen of the Old West displayed a rough and ready sagacity that reflected Socratic wisdom, a harmonizing of courage and moderation. If there is a lesson for such thinkers to learn from Peterson it is the need to supplement their caution with appropriate boldness. With a civilization to be saved, we may all need to cowboy up.

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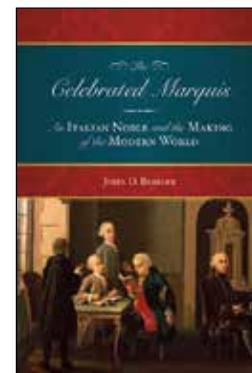
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