

OpenTheo

Introducing Jordan Peterson

April 21, 2019



Alastair Roberts

A talk in which I introduce the work of Jordan Peterson, delivered at Christ Church Anglican, South Bend, IN (www.christchurchsb.org) on January 31st, 2019.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>. You can see transcripts of my videos here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/list-of-videos-and-podcasts/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

If you have enjoyed these talks, please tell your friends and consider supporting me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>. You can also support me using my PayPal account: <https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>.

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Welcome to Jordan Peterson and Christianity, a distinguished lecture by a distinguished speaker. Before I introduce the speaker, a word about the sponsor of tonight's lecture. This is the first lecture in a series called Church Past and Future, sponsored by Christ Church Anglican.

Christ Church is a new Anglican church here in South Bend. We started holding worship services last fall and we meet, thanks to the generosity of St. Paul's United Methodist Church, here in this wonderful building on Sunday nights at 6pm. All are welcome to join us.

Our speaker tonight is Dr. Alastair Roberts. He's an Englishman who grew up in the

Republic of Ireland as the child of English missionaries. He obtained his PhD from Durham University, where his thesis was entitled, *The Red Sea Crossing and Christian Baptism, a Study in Liturgy and Typology*.

Dr. Roberts is a prolific blogger and podcaster and author. His recent book is called *Echoes of Exodus, Tracing Themes of Redemption Through Scripture*. He is a major contributor to two theological institutes, the Theopolis Institute with Peter Lighthouse, which has the tagline, Bible Liturgy Culture, and the Davina Institute, which advances the rediscovery of Reformation era thought in continuity with the pre-Reformation church.

These credentials and accomplishments aside, there are several things I find unusually refreshing about Alastair. One is his brilliance in understanding how all of scripture is connected in a seamless whole. Another is his breadth of knowledge and willingness to inform his biblical studies with forays into anthropology, sociology, technology, and other fields.

And finally, a trait that is highly unusual for someone who is so engaged in social media on cutting edge topics, Alastair is ever patient in his engagement with others, never huffy or cross or dismissive, the very model of a model public theologian. It's an honor to have Dr. Roberts with us tonight. After his lecture, there will be plenty of time for questions and answers, so save them up and let's welcome Dr. Roberts.

Thank you. It's wonderful to be with you all. Just over a year ago, a Canadian psychologist and professor at the University of Toronto released a book called *Twelve Rules for Life, An Antidote to Chaos*.

On the day of the book's release, he had an interview with Channel 4 in the UK, in which in conversation with a hostile interviewer, he calmly opposed progressive orthodoxies on a variety of different issues, from controversial speech to the gender pay gap. And the YouTube video of that interview went viral, attracting many millions of views, and the book shot up the bestsellers list. Jordan Peterson first rose to prominence in 2016 through his public opposition to the Canadian Bill C-16.

He opposed it on the grounds of it being compelled speech, that people were expected to use their preferred gendered pronouns for trans persons, and his uncompromising stance on free speech and against the progressive left, occurring in a context of escalating polarization on campuses, led many to identify him chiefly as a partisan of the right within the developing culture wars. People who have only encountered Peterson in the context of his forays into the culture wars are often oblivious to the sort of figure that he is, what he stands for, what he is about. Others with some more exposure to Peterson, perhaps through following his incredibly famous and popular videos on YouTube, may see him chiefly as a psychologist turned purveyor of life wisdom, as an advocate for young men, for instance.

However, without some grasp of Peterson as a scholar and a thinker, he will easily mistakenly be pigeonholed as just another reactionary conservative, a sort of pop psychologist, or at best, a wise and powerful speaker and counselor. While most of Peterson's significance in our context is in partially occupying the gap left by fathers, pastors, and strong male leaders in this society, something that's often been emphasized, it's important to appreciate some of the thinking that animates him. His ethics and life counsel arise out of a deeply considered, albeit often tendentious, account of reality and truth, from close and sustained grappling with tough existential questions, the sort of things that move people and challenge them to action, and from a sense of the moral weight and ethical urgency that is fired by intense and lengthy reflection upon the great horrors of the 20th century.

He's an unusual figure, and he's worth paying attention to. Peterson sees himself to be responding to a crisis, to the collapse of meaning within Western society, and to the connected threats of totalitarianism on the one hand, and nihilism on the other, that have faced us after this collapse. Our modern scientific models of the world present the universe as if it were principally one of lifeless matter, as if both consciousness and meaning were accidents, alien to the true nature of reality.

The myths that once ordered our lives as individuals and societies have been decisively rejected by the new scientific models. God is dead, the mythic underpinnings of Western society have largely fallen away, and man now faces the cold void of a meaningless universe that remains empty of consciousness and life. Peterson's existentialism is one that exists in a distinctively post-Christian cultural moment.

Whereas Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky both highlighted the inauthenticity of the established Church and its betrayal of Christ, its founder, Peterson's primary fall is Nietzsche. While Christian dogma dies at the hands of reason, what emerges is something even more dead, this is Peterson's words, something that was never alive, even in the past, nihilism, as well as an equally dangerous susceptibility to new totalizing utopian ideas. So the twin horrors of nihilism and totalitarianism, the threat of engulfing chaos, and the threat of extreme order arising in reaction to the threat of nihilism, have risen to meet God's murderers.

So the death of God yields these two problems. Peterson draws upon the variegated existentialist tradition of Christians, such as Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and atheists, such as Nietzsche and Sartre, and engages with 20th century survivors of the horrors of fascism and communism, Frankl, Hewell, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and other people like that. For Peterson, the crisis that we face is one whose roots are buried deep within our souls.

This isn't just a matter of mixed-up ideas, this is something that goes down to the soul of society. It must be addressed within each one of us. The connection between the soul of

the individual and the soul of a society plunging into nihilism, or on the other hand giving itself over to totalitarianism, is an exceptionally close one in his work.

And Peterson has arrived at this conviction by studying the way society was shaped by Nazism and communism. So for instance, how the many different lies that were told by individuals within East Germany ended up in this big cumulative lie, where everyone telling on their neighbours and being unfaithful to each other leads to this great evil that the whole society participates in, in various ways. To respond to the crises of society and the world, we must begin by cultivating the integrity of each one of our own souls and putting our own houses in order.

If we don't start with ourselves, where will we start? Peterson's thought clearly stands in the existential tradition in its characteristic focus upon responsibility and the necessary bravery of the individual in the face of thrownness and crisis. For Peterson, the fundamental reality of life is suffering. What can I not doubt? The reality of suffering.

It brooks no arguments. Nihilists cannot undermine it with scepticism. Totalitarians cannot banish it.

Cynics cannot escape from its reality. Suffering is real. And the artful infliction of suffering on another for its own sake is wrong.

This became the cornerstone of my belief. It is meaning that enables us to escape, or rather to survive, the crucible of suffering and to emerge from it stronger on the other side. This is a key conviction in Peterson's belief.

As a clinical psychologist, Peterson opposes the dominance of technical reason in the framing of human experience. The landscape in which human beings exist is not that primarily of the objective world, but a world of effect, of meaning, of drama. Something such as pain, for instance, has a reality in the experiential world that cannot simply be mapped onto the objective world.

Yet science so often strips the world of meaning for the achievement of its specific and appropriate purposes. But it is illegitimate to present this denuded world, this world stripped of meaning, as if it were the real world, in a manner that renders human experience illusory and alien to reality. E. A. Burt, in his book *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, writes about Galileo's effect in his framing of the world.

This is Burt. The features of the world, now classed as secondary, unreal, ignoble, and regarded as dependent on the deceitfulness of sense, are just those features which are most intense to man in all but his purely theoretic activity, and even in that, except where he confines himself strictly to the mathematical method. It was inevitable that in these circumstances man should now appear to be outside of the real world.

Man is hardly more than a bundle of secondary qualities. Love, personhood, suffering,

meaning, all these things are seen as secondary. They're not real in that deep sense.

And Peterson's dealing with this sort of world that has resulted from the scientific revolution, from nihilism, totalitarianism, from the effect of the movement of the death of God, these sorts of things. For its part, psychology cannot be reduced to a narrow scientific discipline, in Peterson's thought, merely dealing with objectively delineated illnesses. It is inescapably concerned with the art of living well, with ethics, and with values, with meaning, and with purpose.

Philosophical and religious questions are unavoidable here. We can't avoid these questions. We can't escape the question of what does it mean to be human? What does suffering mean? What does it mean to be in touch with reality? These are questions that have an existential urgency for us, that our science can't quite capture or do justice to.

And much psychology shrugs off. We can think of medicating these things as if they were primarily problems that did not involve the human spirit and human thought and understanding of ourselves. Now medicine can be important, but it's not finally the answer to the human problem.

And Peterson is putting this on the front stage again. This needs to be tackled. Peterson follows the tradition of phenomenology in foreground in the human perceptual and experiential world.

Now my first experience of Peterson's work was in 2013, watching a video that he did in the University of Toronto, a TEDx video, where he talks about reality. And it's perhaps an unusual avenue into his thought. For most people, the avenue into his thought is some appearance on Joe Rogan, or some discussion with something like the Cathy Newman debate, or his 12 rules.

But this lecture, he discusses reality. What does meaning mean? What does it mean to be in touch with reality? What is reality? And how do we understand that in relationship to humanity? As it appears within this world, reality is inherently meaningful. Peterson cites Ludwig Binswanger, 1881 to 1966, in his lectures.

He writes, what we perceive are first and foremost not impressions of taste, tone, smell or touch, not even things or objects, but rather meanings. In the realm of human perception, it is not the case that we undertake a mental process of transmuting some brute and meaningless reality that first registers in our consciousness and perception into one that is pregnant with meaning. Rather, the reality that we perceive is always already charged with meaning.

Indeed, it is perceived as meaning, as meaningful. This move is a significant one. It unsettles the implicit understanding of the world that is prevalent in the West, one in which science's denuded reality is conceptually foregrounded, as if that were the real

world and our experience of the world were somehow less than, or somehow illusory on some level.

It resists the idea that human experience and perception are a sort of alien veneer overlaid upon a reality that is fundamentally lifeless, meaningless and impersonal, relegated to a realm of an essentially illusory subjectivity. Phenomenology's challenge to the subjective-objective divide is also an important element of Peterson's approach. The world that we encounter is not a pure objective world.

It's a world that is charged with subjective meanings, but subjective meanings aren't just separated into this internal realm. Rather, we engage in a world that is charged with meanings. Our relationship with the world is meaningful.

Peterson presses the point even further. Following Meadower Boss, 1903-1990, Peterson makes a deeper claim about being itself. Human experience is not merely a filter that frames reality as meaningful and value-laden for us, beauty being purely in the eye of the beholder.

Rather, things such as beauty inhere in the objects themselves. When we look at the world, when we go, for instance, to the edge of the Grand Canyon, there is something that is appropriately awe-inspiring about that. Our response to that is not merely a subjective thing.

It's a proper relationship to what we are experiencing. Things such as beauty inhere in the objects themselves and manifest themselves to us. We can be closed off to reality, dulled to its glory.

Yet there are occasions when, perhaps for a brief window of time, our eyes are opened and we can be awestruck with wonder once again, or with beauty and dread. Young children often display this form of innocent perceptual openness to the world. People in love can perceive the genuine wonder of another person in ways others cannot.

That sense of that person becomes, as it were, a shining thing within the world. Their glory manifests. You see something about them that exudes beyond the realm of the mere appearance.

There is something remarkable about this person. You look in their eyes and there is something greater there. Our perception, however, typically narrows to specific ways of functional and socially accepted being.

And in the process, it can shield out the shining forth of being, oblivious to a glory beyond our grasp. Now, as you see people who experience beauty, for instance, as their eyes are opened, there is something that transforms them. It's one of the things I find remarkable when you watch people who are seeing something remarkably beautiful.

When you see someone, for instance, in the experience of the rapture of watching a remarkable performance of a musical piece, and it's as if their faces shine, there's a washing away of the cynicism, the hardness, the closed-off nature of our faces that we often have. And we're opened up to the world. And Peterson's talking in part about that sort of experience.

The world is a glorious thing. And as we open up to it, we are transformed by that. Peterson is committed to the primacy of the individual.

Only the individual truly suffers. The group does not suffer, save insofar as it is composed of individuals. It is the individual who can take responsibility, that can rise to consciousness, or bear the weight of being.

Where society itself is failing, courageous individuals need to step into the breach and bear that weight, or if they do not step forth, we will all perish. It's worth reflecting here upon how formative reflection upon Nazism and Communism have been for Peterson. Societies like our society prioritize conformity to its order.

So to be a healthy individual, you have to be well-adapted to society. Now when you're thinking about Communist society or Nazi society, if you're well-adapted to that society, you are not in a healthy human condition. So Peterson's thinking in part of how do you live as an individual that can stand against a Hitler, or a Lenin, or a Stalin, or can be someone that avoids getting entangled in the lies of Communist East Germany.

Peterson's is not the individualism of a selfish culture of hedonic self-actualization and indifference to the common good. An individualism that shrugs off all external claims and limits upon the self, yet is actually shallow, biddable, and deeply conformist. Rather, it is an individualism that is engaged with and committed to a natural and moral underlying reality.

A reality deeper than society itself, and which is thereby able to withstand the pressures of society, the danger of what he calls ideological possession, and the temptations of mere self-gratification. Alert, honest, conscientious, and responsible, and courageous individuals are the wellsprings of good societies. Peterson is passionately concerned for the awakening of such an individualism at our moment in history.

Persons who have lost the ability to tell the truth and act accordingly, to discern the truth, can easily become what he calls ideologically possessed. Like dummies for a ventriloquized belief system, an easy prey for tyranny. He writes, deceitful, inauthentic individual existence is the precursor to social totalitarianism.

I doubt that there is anyone you have read who is as focused upon the importance of telling the truth as Jordan Peterson. At least two of his rules focus very closely upon this issue. What does it mean to tell the truth? Not just to not tell small lies and fibs, but truth

in a deeper sense.

That truth is the foundation, the bedrock, upon which a good society is laying. For opponents of Peterson, who are advocates of social constructivist theories and identity politics, to whom Peterson controversially refers as cultural Marxists, the self can often seem to be spoken of as if it were merely an epiphenomenon of the forms of socialization acting upon it, the powers structuring and categorizing it, and as if its identity were merely the precise intersectional alignment of the groups and classes to which it belongs. The postmodernism Peterson attacks is often hostile to a strong sense of the self, grounded in a reality deeper than society.

Indeed, it is often arguably dogmatically so, in things such as Michel Foucault's claim that man was doomed himself to disappear following the death of God, or Butler's account of performativity, there's something of the cause of the fundamental antagonism between Peterson and the postmodernists coming to the surface. We can see part of what he's pushing against. The outworking of such an understanding of selves will make people more vulnerable to becoming the puppets of ideas and movements.

Now, I don't think Peterson's necessarily the best critic of these movements, but there's a tension there that is important to understand where that's coming from. In Peterson's estimation, Carl Jung is the most towering genius of the past century, and Jung's influence pervades Peterson's thought. Jung, after an intense initial connection, parted ways with Sigmund Freud due to, among other reasons, his questioning of Freud's narrow emphasis upon sexual explanations for psychological phenomena, and Jung's interest in the realm of parapsychology.

Jung was fascinated with the realm of the imagination and the unconscious, of fantasies, dreams, nightmares, visions, myths and legends, mysticism, the occult, prophecies, symbols, spirit, the paranormal, alchemy and astrology, and all these other weird things. Jung sought to reawaken people to the mysterious and terrifying subterranean world of the human psyche that slumbered beneath the rational strictures of the modern age. Trying to get us back in touch with this sleeping creature animality within ourselves that is part of our consciousness, but yet we seldom come into direct contact with.

He wants to reconnect us with a realm where this reality is still widely felt, although the once potent sense of its presence can generally be forgotten. While Freud focused upon individual experience in the formation of the psyche, Jung challenged the notion that this development occurred within an essentially unstructured self. From the consistent appearance of the same set of mythological themes, symbols, images, thoughts and ideas across cultures, times and persons, Jung inferred the existence of what he called a collective unconscious and its constituent archetypes.

So in the dark and dusty basements of the human psyche are the psychic structures that

we have inherited from our ancestors back in the midst of prehistory. Rather than being blank slates written upon by experience, a collective unconscious is present in each of us as a determinative psychic structure evoked and activated by particular realities in our world. Despite the differences that we see between cultures and persons, each of which is uniquely configured, we discover a remarkable imaginative commonality between them.

Go to a foreign society, other side of the world, and you'll find the same archetypes. The great mother, for instance, or the father figure. These figures of the child, for instance, or the apocalypse.

These are all images that play in the collective unconscious. Archetypes can involve predispositions to patterns of behavior or modes of functioning, which can give rise to images such as the mother, the father, death, male and female, hero, that sort of thing. So it's connected in part to what we can talk about in animals as ethology, these patterns of conditioned behavior that respond to certain impulses.

Now in human beings that takes a more mythic form in the form of these archetypes. It isn't the case, for instance, that we are blank slates who develop connections to our mothers purely through behavioristic mechanisms. Jung maintained that human beings have, among various other archetypes, a mother archetype, which is evoked and activated by the presence of our particular mothers and their similarity to this archetype.

The underlying archetype gradually assumes a unique and determinate personalized form through the ways it is activated by and refracted through the particularity of our experience. By the existence of such archetypes, our natures are prepared for, predisposed to, and drawn towards our mothers, much as our mothers are prepared for us through their possession of a child archetype. Such archetypes are akin to the sort of instinctual animal behaviors explored by ethologists, as I've discussed.

Now religion functions at the level of the archetypes. It's something that evokes these deep patterns of human meaning, behavior, and response. It presents symbols that evoke and articulate these fundamental human responses.

It runs far deeper than ideology. Ideology, the sets of ideas that we can often be very conscious of. Religion enters that deeper substructure of the human consciousness.

Something that emerges at points in dreams and elsewhere. And ideology can have a very tenacious grip upon the conscious mind, but has much less imaginative purchase at that fundamental level of our psyche. In the study of religions, we can come to an understanding of the structure of human reality itself.

Due to religion's rootedness in the collective unconscious, we ought not be surprised by the frequently striking resemblances between religions, even those that have developed

independently of each other. They're dealing with fundamental structures of human life. Now, Peterson brings a twist to this Jungianism in his distinctively Darwinian accent.

So he gives a Darwinian emphasis to this Jungianism. The archetypes have developed as we evolved to our natural and social environments over many millions of years. This emphasis is part of the reason for Peterson's illustrative discussion of the lobster.

Now, you may have heard of the lobster in association with Jordan Peterson. This is where it comes into effect. He has been much ridiculed and somewhat misrepresented, but fundamentally it is a confusing example that he gives at points.

And it is a weak example at many points as well. His argument is that hierarchical social structures exist even among lobsters, operating according to comparable and related neurochemical processes to those that exist in our own brains. The fact that our history, evolutionary history according to Peterson, diverged from the lobsters so many millions of years ago, and yet you still see these commonalities.

His point is it goes really deep down. These are deep structures of our animality that are coming forth. Peterson isn't merely making simplistic prescriptive claims at such points.

You must behave like the lobster, be more like the lobster. Rather, he's highlighting the existence of commonalities between our behavioral and perceptual structures, and those of far less complex creatures. A prescriptive approach would be incredibly reductive, ignoring how immensely complex human nature and society are compared to those of lobsters.

But the denial of the existence of these deep psychological structures leaves us ill-equipped to grapple with the reality of our natures. That we have these patterns and instincts and other things within our natures. And his point is that we must recognize the existence of these structures forged within us, and do real business with them.

We can't ignore them, they're there, and they affect the way that we live. Even when we're interacting within a group of very refined people who have studied in universities and learnt all the wisdom of society, we still have these instincts that are at work within us. We still have some sort of sense of a hierarchical social structure, senses of bonding with certain people according to archetypes, these sorts of things.

For Christians, typically inclined to be highly critical of Darwinian accounts of reality, it is worth considering that evolutionists are increasingly a politically incorrect element of society, with their reminder that humanity has a nature, albeit an evolving one, and that we are beings bound up with the wider natural order. We can't remake ourselves at will. This falls afoul of the popular ideological evaluation of autonomous human will, power and reason over natural limits or identities.

It violates the conviction that we can remake our nature through the constructions of

society. Now we can certainly change a lot of things through that, but ultimately our reality of our nature is not purely plastic. It can't be made, it's not malleable into whatever form we want it to be.

Attention to nature challenges all these sorts of false beliefs, and the focus upon the etiology and purpose of traits and behaviours, and comparable patterns in other species, all serve to disclose the fact that our nature has a form, and that that form is not arbitrary, but it serves certain purposes for our species. Even if we were to dispute their accounts of the origins of the features in question, evolutionary biology and psychology help us to recognise the purpose of certain features of our nature, its instincts, the natural ends of various differences, for instance between the sexes, and the ordering of our natures to particular realities of our natural and human environment. For believers in autonomous reason, or in the elevation of humanity above all in animality, this is both a lesson of considerable importance and a cause of great offence within our society.

Jungian archetypes then are forms of evolution to the social environment, so we don't just evolve to the natural environment, we also evolve to succeed, we have to evolve to each other, because if we do not succeed in relationship to each other, then we're not going to survive as a species. And these have evolved, developed along with us according to Peterson. They orient us to male and female, to mothers and fathers, to children, to the future, to death and disaster, to self-consciousness, and to a host of other realities.

Peterson's Darwinianism is often displayed in his discussion of human thought and action, as realities deeply embedded in our physiological and evolutionary history. We are not creatures that can be abstracted from our bodies, as if we were ghosts inhabiting corpses, which we can often think about ourselves as. As Christians, we don't think much about our bodies.

And yet, our bodies are very central within our Christian faith. The human being, mind and body, is part of and evolutionarily adapted to the physical world. Despite our capacity for higher thought, there are natural continuities between our brains and those of lower species, and our higher forms of thought and behavior are not neatly detached from the more instinctual dimensions of our brains, but are bound up with them, constrained by them, and typically piggybacking upon them.

The confluence of these different themes of Peterson's thought occurs in the notion of myth. So we've got these Darwinian themes, these Jungian themes, and these existentialist themes, and they come together in myth. The world that we encounter is a world of meaning that must be approached mythopoetically, through the making of myths.

It is through the narrative structuring of myth that we can make sense of the world as a realm of human action and agency. So when we see the world, we're not just seeing it as

a realm of stuff that we just act within, raw material for making things. We see it as a realm of action, a realm of purposes, of meanings, something that we're involved with, we're intervalled with the world.

In a very deep sense, we're entangled with it. And that is expressed within myths. These myths are forms of archetypes, developed through the evolution of the collective unconscious, and variously expressed in the mythologies and religions of the world.

They offer the individual a framework for meaningful action within the world. Now when we read ancient myths, we often wonder whether people actually believe them. We tend to read ancient myths as if they were often laughably mistaken primitive forms of science.

We presume that they were trying to accomplish what our culture achieves using scientific accounts. But Peterson writes, We have made the great mistake of assuming that the world of spirit, described by those who preceded us, was the modern world of matter, primitively conceptualized. This is not true, at least not in the simple manner we generally believe.

The cosmos described by mythology was not the same place known to the practitioners of modern science, but that does not mean that it was not real. So the world described by myth is a realm of action and purposes. A realm where all these human things, things like love, personhood, belonging, purpose, meaning, faith, these things all have weight within the world of myths.

In the world of science, they don't, in the same way. And so Peterson's describing this world of myth as a world that is a real, the real world. And science occurs within that world, but it's fundamentally a realm of action.

We will not understand myth until we recognize that it renders the world in terms of its significance for action. For instance, as a battle between good and evil, or a matter of balancing order and chaos. He writes, The mythic imagination is concerned with the world in the manner of the phenomenologist, who seeks to discover the nature of subjective reality instead of concerning himself with descriptions of the objective world.

Myth and the drama that is part of myth provide answers in image to the following question. How can the current state of experience be conceptualized in abstraction with regard to its meaning? Myths then disclose the internal structure of meaningful human action. But this does not mean that myths are without a public truth character, or even lacking in a truthful relationship to the objective reality.

Myths are concerned with subjective reality, but this subjective reality isn't merely private, as if the collective unconscious means that the structure of subjective reality, despite variations, or rather, this isn't merely private, as the collective unconscious

means that the structure of subjective reality, despite variations, is consistent in its fundamentals between persons and across cultures. It goes all around the world, and you'll see the same patterns of life and meaning, ethics, this sense of order within the world, as C.S. Lewis would talk about in *The Abolition of Man*, the Tao, this fundamental pattern of nature that people discern across the world. With all the variations, there is this fundamental continuity.

Peterson also believes that in some manner that remains mysterious to him, consciousness itself is constitutive of our universe's reality. While the subjective reality displayed in myth is distinct from the objective reality of the universe, these realities aren't divorced from each other. Recall that Peterson follows Bosse's account of being a shiny force, holding a form of phenomenology that emphasizes the fittingness of human perception to the intrinsic reality of the world.

Peterson is prepared to make the bold suggestion that consciousness, or some *logos*, is constitutive of reality itself, not merely an accidental or apparent epiphenomenal feature of a purely material order. Miracles, he argues, can occur when these two realities touch. I'm sure that every reader of *Twelve Rules for Life* has been struck by how much he talks about the Bible.

It isn't what you expect in a self-help book, nor in a book written by a modern clinical psychologist. To have reflections, for instance, that talk about source criticism in the book of Genesis, that's a bit odd. It's not what you're used to.

So much of it is given over to biblical exegesis, particularly of the opening chapters of Genesis. Peterson recently delivered a series of lengthy public lectures on the subject of the psychological significance of the biblical narratives. And millions of people watched these things on YouTube.

Now, how many people would you expect would watch a two-hour long lecture on the psychological significance of the beginning of Genesis 1? A few million. It's amazing. It's encouraging in some ways, too.

He reaches back to the story of Jacob, for instance, and these characters, and goes all the way back to Adam and thinks about what do these things mean? What does it mean to think about the world in terms of the existence of God? And he expresses his intention to continue this ambitious project in the future to address the whole of the rest of the Bible. His doctrine of Scripture is roughly delineated in this following passage from *Twelve Rules*. This is Peterson.

The Bible is, for better or worse, the foundational document of Western civilization, of Western values, Western morality, and Western conceptions of good and evil. It's the product of processes that remain fundamentally beyond our comprehension. The Bible is a library composed of many books, each written and edited by many people.

It's a truly emergent document, a selected, sequenced, and finally coherent story written by no one and everyone over many thousands of years. The Bible has been thrown up out of the deep by our collective human imagination, which is itself a product of unimaginable forces operating over unfathomable spans of time. Its careful, respectful study can reveal things to us about what we believe and how we do and should act that can be discovered in almost no other manner.

That's a remarkable statement when you think about it. It's certainly far from an Orthodox Christian's doctrine of Scripture, but it has several points of contact with such doctrines. First, the Bible is coming from a source that exceeds its human authors.

In place of the concept of divine inspiration, Peterson speaks of the Bible emerging from the deep of the collective human imagination, the collective unconscious. Second, the Bible is treated as a coherent text, albeit coherent at the level of myth. Third, the Bible is to be approached with care and responsibility and respect as a book that reveals to us the truth about ourselves.

That's a remarkable statement. Finally, a book such as the Bible is necessary to teach us things that we couldn't learn in other ways. Peterson's Jungian and existential approach to the Bible has the unfortunate effect of frequently obscuring the historical and social dimensions of its truth, with its focus on the structure of the individual's subjective reality.

At points you wonder whether the particularity of this narrative, this particular story, retreats into this general realm of myth and these archetypes that are shared in common with other ancient Near Eastern myths, and Egyptian stories of the creation, and the significance of figures like Horus and other things like that. But I don't think that is true most of the time. He pays attention to the particularity of the biblical text.

The individual focus, while an understandable expression of Peterson's existentialism, is regrettable as the exploration of Jungian readings within a more anthropological framework would prove, I believe, much more revelatory. What may at first glance present itself as a Copernican revolution in biblical interpretation leaves us, however, at many points with something more akin to complicated Ptolemaic epicycles, this complicated system of a sort of psychological allegorization of the text. It's an aesthetically elegant yet over-involved system that doesn't possess quite the explanatory power that it claims for itself.

Many of Peterson's interpretations of text will seem strained to the praying biblical exegete, attempts to force uncompliant texts into an alien system that strays rather far from the letter. Nevertheless, at many points, Peterson is a deeply perceptive and attentive reader of scripture, whose alert dimensions of the text to which many more conventional interpreters of scripture are quite blind. For instance, having done extensive work on the opening three chapters of Genesis, to which Peterson himself

gives close attention in Twelve Rules, I was often impressed by Peterson's attentiveness, observation, and insight.

He sees things that many commentators ignore, particularly about the symbolic world of Genesis. And the symbolic world is a very powerful thing in Genesis. Order and chaos, about the relationship between the sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth, these different patterns of things moving in concert with each other, forming and filling, this pattern of time where God sets up the beat of the original creation, evening, morning, evening, morning, the middle day at the heart of the creation, setting up the sun, moon, and stars to rule the day and the night, and then you have this climactic day of the Sabbath that completes the week.

And there's this whole dance that God is establishing within the creation that is symbolic and charged with significance of life. And Peterson has some sense of this, that we're placed within a dance of the world, whereas many modern readers of Scripture lack that sense of how lively the creation is, how full of symbolism and meaning in these connections. You have the sun and the moon in the heavens, you have man and woman on the earth, you have the heaven and the earth, and then you have the seas and the waters above and the waters beneath, and all these relationships between them.

It's a reality charged with meaning and significance. And throughout the Scripture, you see this being played out. Peterson pays a lot of attention to the archetypes of chaos and order, which are quite prominent in Genesis 1 and 2. Order, he argues, is the known.

It's associated, he argues, with masculinity, God the Father, the social system, law, tyranny, things like that. Chaos, or the unknown, or the novel, is associated with femininity, with origins, with matter, with the source of being that is veiled, with nature, with birth, these sorts of things. So it's like the relationship between the light of the heavens and the dirt that can't be penetrated by that light.

And the more that you get down into the dirt of reality, the harder it is to understand, and the more particular and gritty it becomes. And so he's dealing with this sort of order. Now chaos, for Peterson, is not bad per se, nor is order good per se.

For Peterson, we must navigate between these two, relating them in a healthy balance, so that we aren't, on the one hand, overcome by chaos, and on the other hand, we aren't trapped in excessive order. And he argues that the association of order with the masculine arises from various associations, not least the fact that throughout history and across cultures, men have overwhelmingly been the ones who forged the social order and the infrastructure of society. And the association of women with chaos is not necessarily a negative one in his thoughts, but it often comes across that way, and it plays out that way.

Peterson is helping you to protect you, rules to protect you from chaos. What exactly is

meant there? I don't believe, if you read his work, that that's necessarily a negative thing. The point is that women are the source of newness, possibility, and the unknown, primarily in terms of gestation, birth, things like that.

They are associated with the veiled origins and place limits upon the masculine order. So the masculine order can be expressed in a tyranny that tries to cross and control things, and the disorder that can result from that is the unmapped, the things that exist. The sea, for instance, is associated with chaos, the land with order.

If you want to read some interesting discussion of Genesis along this front, I'd recommend Mathieu Pajot's *The Symbolism of Creation*. He discusses many of these themes in ways that push back against Peterson in some respects, because I don't think Peterson is correct in the way he's treating Genesis here. Modern readers of Genesis seldom recognize such archetypes in the text, as our scientific mindsets make it difficult for us to perceive the cosmos as a realm lively with meaning and drama, all ordered around the perceptual and affective world that we inhabit.

The idea that our being, created male and female, might be approached as a reflection and manifestation of a deeper, natural and cosmic order is difficult for us to grasp. Though it's clearly discernible in various forms in Genesis to those who are alert to pre-modern forms of thought. While the specific way that Peterson frames these masculine and feminine archetypes, for instance, is not quite the same as the male and female archetypes that emerge from Genesis itself, the opening chapters of Genesis clearly present grand archetypes to anyone who is listening carefully.

To the own ancient mind, many of these things were immediately apparent, and you see them across societies. As human beings, as male and female, we are caught up into this grand dance of the creation. We're not just detached individuals stuck on Earth.

We dress up and we enter into this reality. It's a glorious aspect. So when we dress up for a special occasion, we accentuate what it means to be male and female in a way that tries to connect us with something more glorious about the world.

And this is something that you find within many traditional, primitive societies, where male and female is connected to the grand reality of the cosmos. That we are connected to these patterns of the sun and the moon, to the Earth and the heavens. There is this playing out of this great drama within our relationship to each other.

The phenomenological notion of truth, and the phenomenological truth of reality, the anthropomorphic character of a meaningful cosmos as the realm of our habitation, is presented in the form of myth, but literalizing modern readers have lost the ability to hear it. Conservative Christians can often hear the truth of scripture in a way that's narrowly trapped within an objective model of scientific reality. That doesn't mean that we need to say that this is pure myth with no connection to reality.

That's not the point. The point is rather that it is presenting the world as a realm of action. This is not just saying that these things happen step by step.

The point is, God is presenting us with the world as a realm of meaning. The Garden of Eden is a sanctuary. It's a realm of God's habitation.

It's a model for the tabernacle, for the temple. Adam and Eve within that, they're created to be God's co-creators. God is training Adam and Eve to create with him as those who are his children.

Now, that helps us to think not just of these things that happened in the past, but of ourselves as acting within the world, as creatures of God who are supposed to transform and beautify and make glorious the world, to finish what God started in Genesis 1, and to bring it to a glorious completion. Now, that's the way to read Genesis 1 and 2, within a more mythopoetic manner. Even in seeking to read the scripture of the reading of Genesis in a way that emphasizes facticity, our scientific alienation from the mythopoetic imagination leaves many of us unable to grasp much of the significance of these chapters, let alone the way that something like the sacrificial system would function in the lives of its practitioners.

Why would you sacrifice these particular animals for these particular persons? Why is Israel represented by these five animals? The bull, the goat, the sheep, the turtle dove and the pigeon. Why those animals? What's the significance of the hoof and chewing the cud? Or these different animals that we find in the sea, why not eat lobsters? These are all questions, yes, these are all questions that we have within scripture that we're not really equipped to answer from a modern perspective. But within the ancient perspective, upon a mythopoetic reality, human life and its meanings are mapped onto the creation, and we dance out in relationship to these things.

They are our partners for understanding who we are. The theological concepts that emerge from Peterson's work are often highly idiosyncratic and unorthodox, although they can have surprising points of resonance with orthodox Christian doctrine. His account of scripture, for instance, is one such example.

To understand his theology, it's important to consider that he's arguing for the mythic truth of the Christian message as it relates to its subjective reality. It's not necessarily the same thing as saying these things happened historically. He holds a curious admixture of agnosticism, hopeful supposition and disbelief concerning its historical and objective facticity.

At various points, mythic truths have a more explicit concrete reference in his understanding. For instance, for Peterson, hell is a real place, but it's not what Christians speak about as hell. For Peterson, it's the horrific social reality that results when people abandon their integrity and give themselves over to evil.

The concept of God, for Peterson, seems to be a personification of the force that governs fate within the universe. The future, he speaks about, is a judgmental father. And you can sacrifice, you can give up things now to that God and find blessing in the future that's delayed gratification.

You can bargain with this force. Whatever the existence or nonexistence of God, and Peterson seems to be genuinely agnostic on this point, properly performed sacrifice comports the offerer well to the universe. Peterson consistently downplays conceptual theological belief for an account of religion as practical belief.

What do you believe? How do I know what you believe? I pay attention to what you do. And in what you do, I see what you truly believe. Religion is the dramatic mythology that enables us to dance effectively with the world.

It isn't about the lower ethical concerns of right and wrong, but about the archetypal concerns of good and evil. About ultimate value, Peterson insists that it is impossible to be a practical atheist. He writes, You are simply not an atheist in your actions, and it is your actions that most accurately reflect your deepest beliefs, those that are implicit, embedded in your being, underneath your conscious apprehensions and articulable attitudes and surface-level self-knowledge.

His account of human nature has a very Augustinian flavour, a sense of original sin and other things like that. Christ, in Peterson's conception, is the archetypal perfect man, the historical figure who approaches so close to be identified with the archetype. Those who are paying attention shouldn't be surprised to see that Peterson focuses upon Christ primarily as an example to imitate, rather than as the saviour to trust.

He writes, Christ's archetypal death exists as an example of how to accept finitude, betrayal and tyranny heroically, how to walk with God despite the tragedy of self-conscious knowledge. Now it's interesting, the heterodox account of Christ's suffering and sacrifice that emerges from this has a strangely reverent flavour to it. And at many points, Peterson sounds like a liberal theologian that actually believes what he's saying, which is a really strange thing.

But we do see that in something like maps of meaning. He does sound like someone who has a liberal gospel but actually believes it. The meaning of Christ's death mythologised yields the following summation of Christian truth.

In the Christian tradition, this is Peterson, Christ is identified with the logos. The logos is the word of God. That word transformed chaos into order at the beginning of time.

In his human form, Christ sacrificed himself voluntarily to the truth, to the good, to God. In consequence, he died and was reborn. The word that produces order from chaos sacrifices everything, even itself, to God.

That single sentence, wise beyond comprehension, sums up Christianity. Every bit of learning is a little death. Every bit of new information challenges a previous conception, forcing it to dissolve into chaos before it can be reborn as something better.

Now, the account of salvation that Peterson offers is not without elements of grace. While acknowledging the pathetic and wicked natures that we have as sons and daughters of Adam, he speaks compassionately to people as those who can be redeemed. But yet this redemption chiefly consists of confronting and addressing the evil of your own nature, starting to move towards the good, devoting your life towards meaningful responsibility, and gaining victory over shame in your sinful nature as you develop a natural dignity, as you follow the example of Christ and learn how to walk with God.

Now you can see there are elements of that that resonate with Christianity and many other respects in which it is falling very far short. There is no robust account of divine grace or deliverance here. And even on Peterson's own terms it would seem to be that would make sense.

There's something, it would make sense to include those elements. Thinking about the world as something of grace, it elicits gratitude. A way of living in the world is far more rich and free and full than a way that has no sense of grace and gratitude.

And someone that you can give thanks to, not just a force that you can live in terms of. Peterson argues that Christianity addressed some of the most fundamental issues in human society, but that it started to be eclipsed when, as society grew forgetful of the significance of problems that Christianity addressed, new problems came to light for which science appeared the more promising saviour. He presents Nietzsche's critique of Christianity sympathetically, and the church distorted the Christian message by replacing abstract belief and worship of Christ for actually living in terms of Christ.

But yet he leans more in favour of Dostoevsky's representation of the matter in his famous Grand Inquisitor speech from the Brothers Karamazov, which identifies the corruption and distortion of the church, while recognising that Christ, even in this corruption, can still live and act and fill some room and even potentially reign. Peterson recognises the temporal necessity of the limiting dogmatic structure of the church, but yet he has an ambivalent relationship with the church, someone who sees part of its significance, but yet felt alienated by it in his childhood, never actually truly belonging to it. It should be clear by this point that Peterson has an extensive and highly considered religious position.

He is offering much more than mere self-help. He is presenting a broader account of reality and humanity's place within it. He is synthesising several philosophical accounts of reality, literary, psychological, religious and scientific thinkers, into a vision of reality that is lively and often existentially compelling, especially when contrasted with the

prevailing scientism of our day.

Although much of his life counsel is presented apart from such an account, anyone diving deeper into Peterson's work will very quickly encounter these elements, which come to the foreground the closer you come to the heart of Peterson's thought. This is what ultimately animates him and drives him. Not just shallow self-help, but a deeper account of reality and meaning.

While he is very friendly to Christians and places considerable weight upon the Bible and certain loci of Christian doctrine, he is very far from an orthodox Christianity in many respects. His account of Christian truth is highly idiosyncratic, albeit frequently brilliantly so, even in its error. But in its frequent proximity to Christian thought, in content as well as in form, it requires some degree of caution in our engagement with it.

There are many things we can gain from it, but yet there is a sense that there is something slightly off here. It is not quite what we hold as Christians. And yet there are things we can learn.

There is an ethos and a pathos to Peterson's presentation of this belief that puts many preachers to shame. He expresses these truths with a weight and a gravity that communicates to people at a deep level. You see the way people glom to him.

There is something about him that presents the truth with the gravity that is appropriate to the truth. And after we have lost that gravity, we don't have a sense that this is something that should take deep root and weight in our hearts. That these are truths to live by.

These are rules for life, not just something that you hold in your head and can rattle around there when you go around your life in much the same way as everyone else. This is something that will give you meaning when you are faced with chaos, when you are struggling with suffering, when you are struggling with the dissolution of your world or your society. You can grab onto these things and they will carry you through.

It will be a way to persevere through suffering. Now many Christians do not present the Christian faith like that. And we should be ashamed of ourselves for that reason.

When someone like Peterson comes along and presents truths that are half of the truth with a stronger force than we can muster in the presentation of the one who is the truth. And I find that very striking and embarrassing as a Christian, thinking about how far we fall short in that respect. I think we have a lot to gain from engagement with someone like Peterson.

His courageous integrity is worthy of our admiration and imitation. And much of his counsel is wise and powerful, especially I think for young men who have often been ill-served by the church. There is other ways that we can think about his foregrounding of

myth that is helpful.

I find there is a quote that C.S. Lewis has where he writes, A man who disbelieved the Christian story's fact but continually fed on it as myth would perhaps be more spiritually alive than one who assented and did not think much about it. That's often where we are as Christians. And yet Peterson is reflecting deeply upon the world of myth and how Christian truth has a mythopoetic force that can carry us through and give us meaning in life.

And so when we think about this engagement with him, I think there are other things that we can give to him. For instance, a Christian emphasis upon grace. That is a transformative truth.

If that's all we have, we don't have a sense of living in terms of Christ. And the grace of being conformed to Christ, of having a life that is formed into his image by the work of the Spirit so that we walk in his steps and we lay down our lives, we carry our crosses after him. Then we're missing something and Peterson emphasizes that.

But without grace, there is so much about our lives that is robbed of its value, of its dynamism, of its charge with beauty and goodness. The Christian message of grace is our deepest treasure to the world. And we can give that message to someone like Peterson and the people who follow him.

A message of forgiveness, of restoration, of deliverance from shame, of the world as a site of gratitude. How thankful do you feel living life? It's a wonderful thing to go through life being thankful. And yet, I don't think Peterson can do that with his system.

There's a lot that he can enjoy and appreciate, but yet I think it falls short of that. And Christians, I think, can give that dimension. In recovering the importance of the mythic character of Christian truth, we should not dispense with its historicity.

The fact that, as the epistle says, we do not follow cunningly devised fables, but declare actual historical events when we declare the work of Christ, is a matter of no small importance. The resurrection actually happened. Our faith is one that is profoundly and inescapably rooted in history, invested in history.

There's a real danger that Peterson's emphasis upon the practical ends of religious truth might lead to a radical deflation of Christian truth into a myth that helps us to live more effectively, but which has little or no factual relation to actual reality, and also loses any distinctiveness from other religious systems out there. The question of the historicity of the resurrection, for instance, is still a live one in Peterson's thinking. The importance of this issue is not merely of historical or personal religious significance, but goes to the very heart of his account of reality.

If this truth that helps us live is just a myth, are we living in reality? At points, it seems as

if Peterson has constructed an incredible and imposing edifice, yet is dallying when it comes to unveiling its foundations. Christians have good reasons for concern here. There are some Christians who, recognising the genuine problems with Peterson and some of the thinkers he is drawing upon, believe that Christians should just keep their distance.

I appreciate there is a note of caution that needs to be sounded here, but we would be missing out if we fail to engage. Part of what underlies this is the idea that Christians have a complete possession of the truth, that we go out into the world as those who are in immediate possession of the truth already, rather than as those who have something to learn from others. A focus upon grand coherentist systems of thought or ideologies will lead to the thoughts of someone with Darwinian, Jungian or certain existentialist convictions being dismissed far too readily, as if the presence of key commitments in opposition to or in tension with Christianity suffice to disqualify most of their thought.

We need to be aware of this. Our thinking develops largely in engagement with the creative reality we share in common with non-Christians. We are all fundamentally engaged in the great human project.

We can talk to historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists like Jordan Peterson, philosophers, we can speak to artists, and we are all engaged in the same human project. There is a confidence that I think Christianity should have as we go out into the world. We are not afraid of anything out there, it is God's world.

And any truth that is out there is God's truth. And we can go with confidence in talking to people and learning from them. There are riches of Christ that are yet to be brought into the Church.

And as we explore the world, we are exploring God's reality. It is an exciting and a joyful, and it is an adventure that we are called out into. I don't think that we should stand with trepidation as we approach these non-Christian thinkers.

We should approach them with the confidence that we have the truth in Christ, and that any truth out there that we learn will help us to understand Christ better. Now obviously there needs to be caution about being led astray, but that confidence should be the fundamental note, I believe. It is one of the things that enables us as academics to engage in the academy in all its parts, not just within a holy huddle of theologians.

And I have always found that one of the joys of Christian theology in a context where you are engaging with all these other disciplines. Because we are all engaged with God's world. Over the centuries, Christians have learned much from pagans, non-Christians, and even apostates, benefiting from their wisdom and insight into human nature and the creation.

We read the classics, we read books from across human history, we study the

humanities because the humanities teach us about who we are, about what human nature is. And we share, we don't know what the cavemen were like, but we know that whatever they were like, they were like characters from a Henry James novel. These are consistencies of human nature.

And there's something that gives us confidence as we go out into the world, as we know that there is a nature, there is a reality, and it's God's reality. Even despite God's gracious revelation of saving truth in scripture, our own understanding of the world and of ourselves remains exceedingly limited. A humble yet discerning receptivity to the insights of those outside of the church is part of how we are supposed to grow in truth.

This isn't safe, but it is how we become strong. Reckoning with the admixture of genuine wisdom and commitments that are clearly at odds with our Christian faith that we encounter in a thinker like Peterson requires maturity. Undertaken carefully and responsibly, however, such engagement can be deeply rewarding.

Yet if stubbornly resisted, not only may we miss an opportunity to grow, we may also be the occasion of people rejecting the church for powerful truths they've discovered locked outside of its walls. Thank you. There's a mic going around now, I think, with any questions that you might have.

Thank you for the talk. What does Peterson say about prayer? There's ideologies, there's archetypes, there's mythology. What does he say about prayer? Is there any place in his thinking to talk about an individual prayer, not just group prayer, but individual prayer? That is a very good question.

I do not recall him treating it to any great length. But yet, again, he would see it, I think, as one of the ways in which we comport ourselves to reality, as we sacrifice the present for the sake of the future and this sort of thing. But Christian understanding of prayer is so much more than that.

And, for instance, the various elements of prayer. We talk about not just praying for things. We give thanks.

We represent our reality to God in a way that does everything with reference to Him. And have a sense of praying for other people. The sense of reality cannot be understood without it being referred to God in every single respect.

And so it is something that punctuates our days in a way that, I'm not sure, a Peterson approach to Christian myth would be characterized by repeated prayer. By the daily office or something like that. There would be a sense of the importance of liturgy, perhaps in joining groups together.

A sense of meanings and values that are inculcated and strengthened by that. But prayer is a lot more than that. And, yeah, I think that's one of the areas where Christians

can push and recognize there are ways in which you would give an account of prayer.

But those accounts don't actually explain the purpose that it plays for us. Very good question. Thank you.

Well, who do you pray to? Yes. By the way, I'm more of a fan of Jordan Peterson than you are. I've read all his stuff.

Even that torturous book, Matt's A Meaning. Yeah. And I agree with you.

Okay, Jordan, right here. Who do you pray to? He has thanks in his New Father's Book. That's one of the rules.

He thanks no matter what. You know, thank you for this doctrine, that kind of thing. But who do you pray to? And my answer, not knowing who in his answer would be, well, I pray to beings.

You're talking about embracing people? Yeah. I pray to somebody. But he's not, as you well know, I'm sure better than me, he's not totally positive about being.

He has a little chip on his shoulder, partly from the suffering of his daughter, you know. But if I could hear him now, I'd say take a little leap. Not even, it doesn't even have to be a big one.

You'll have prayer to being. What do you think about that, whether you think for him God is, seems to work? I mean, he talks about reality is something that he would speak about reality and relate that to God. Reality is personified in the figure of God.

And so it's a relationship to being. I think it might be similar to the way certain people would think about the rules of, or the AA, higher being within that. So it's a concept of relating yourself to a force that's greater than yourself, that enables you to engage with your reality, and you're being overpowered by reality in ways that are just fundamentally healthy to human nature.

So it's important to reckon with the higher being. Now, whether that higher being is a particular named being, as we think about in Christianity, that higher being is not just an anonymous force, or reality itself. It's all given to God.

Yes. When he's angry, he gives it back. And then he kind of gets much better.

He doesn't want to say he doesn't give it back. Yeah. Yes.

It's very much a pragmatic system. So your belief is what you live in terms of. And so to actually push beyond that, to say, well, what actually do you believe about God, Dr. Peterson? Yeah.

So it's very much a system, a pragmatic system. But the question of what that is grounded in, in the more ultimate level, he's a bit more agnostic about that. He's making general statements about the truth of human nature as it's comported to the universe and being, but he's not saying beyond that.

And I think he's wary of being trapped into a dogmatic system. There's a lot of people, I think, who want to trap him within, oh, he's on our side, and we can understand him on that level. Yeah.

Yeah. Of course, the doctrine loves Peterson. He wishes he could become an analyst.

Yeah. And there is something to that. Because many people, they like to have a pigeonhole they can put a thinker in.

Because once they're in the pigeonhole, you've understood them. And their thought becomes, it is no longer active. It's no longer rubbing against you and challenging you because you know where it belongs and it is kept in its place.

And he doesn't want to be in that place. So one area in which Peterson has really risen to fame is with the way that he speaks of and to men in particular, and young men as a subcategory. Let's say I am a leader in the ministry and I am just speaking to men and I think, hey, I should start a discipleship group and we're all going to read 12 rules for life together.

And we're going to do this thing and Earth Peterson is going to be the way to true male spirituality. What would, for this person, hypothetically me, what would maybe some of your warnings be? What would you say to that? Yeah. Maybe don't.

No, I think there are ways in which it can be helpful to engage with that conversation. Because that conversation is an important one. But there is always a danger, I think, for men's groups that we end up talking about masculinity.

And there is nothing less masculine than talking about masculinity. When we think about these things, ultimately, I think part of the appeal of Jordan Peterson, there is a number of aspects to it. He moves beyond the language of rights to responsibility.

Take the heaviest weight you can find and shoulder it. And that resonates with men. And there is good reason that resonates with men.

Because men very much have a sense of identity that is bound up with their agency. And if you can't give meaning to that agency, then what are you saying to them? And often I think the Christian message as it's been presented has eroded or effaced any sense of agency. And yet, when Christian men are often engaged, it's through a sense of restored agency that God is restoring us as actors and people who are supposed to serve in the world.

So, for instance, when we think about the concept of being sons of God. When we think about that, we can often think in the modern sense of being like the ten-year-old son on his father's knee. Having that sense of connection and his love for us.

But in the New Testament, to be a son is a relationship between the adult son and his father. And the adult son is the one who acts in his father's name, who takes on his father's business. The one who learns his father's trade, who works with his father and his brothers and changes the world.

And that, I think, resonates in a different way. And I think Peterson connects to that sort of thing. The other thing is it matters that what Peterson is saying, he is saying as a man.

I've often wondered, when Peterson talks about archetypes, I think he's a good example of how archetypes can work. Imagine a woman saying everything that Peterson says. I think many men would hear that and they would say, this is a wise woman, she's putting forward some very sensible opinions.

I admire this person. But would many young men glum to her in the same way as they do to Peterson? I don't think they would. Peterson resonates because he is speaking as a father figure, as a compassionate father figure.

There are many men within the church, for instance, who berate and harangue young men and say, you're not doing this, you're not doing that, you're not doing the other. Peterson's message is a lot more compassionate. You see him weeping over young men and talking about his conversations with them.

And he cares about them, and that matters. I mean, how many people do you see really caring about young men who are struggling? There aren't a great many people like that. There are some who will weaponize young men's plight and use it to score points against the other side.

But that's not the same thing as really caring. And I think we've often lost that. So speaking to young men in that way, and also presenting a manly father figure who has the courage to speak on issues that are controversial, not just to offend people, I think that's important.

Another thing I found appealing about Peterson on that front is his relationship with his wife. When you hear him talking about his wife, he clearly deeply loves her. When you look at so much of the stuff around men's identity online, it's driven by an antagonism against women.

And that's just unhealthy. Now there are points where Peterson comes out, kind of moves in that sort of direction, apparently. I don't think that's the fullest sense of what he's saying.

But I find it very concerning that so much thought around men's identity drifts in the direction of stuff that's fairly misogynistic. And having an approach that thinks about responsibility and men rising to their full stature in a way that is not antagonistic to women, but is helping women to grow to their full stature too, that's something we need a lot more of. When you're talking then about that group of young men within the church, maybe a better way thing to do would be to take a responsibility together, do something together.

It can often be a way that groups of young men are bonded to others. I'm sure many of the men here have had a very significant experience growing up, the experience of working with their fathers. And coming to that point where your father looks at you not just as a kid, but as a fellow worker.

Or an older man that you respect as a father figure doing that to you. There's a point where you have a sense of dignity and agency, and that this is who I am. I'm no longer a kid, I'm no longer a boy.

And I think churches need to provide a lot more of that sort of thing. You mentioned briefly that George Peterson doesn't generally resonate with more liberal feminists. I'm curious, how do you think one can reconcile Peterson's work, which is clearly geared more toward masculine theology, with a man who, by all intents and purposes, doesn't acknowledge things like the systemic patriarchy that he says doesn't carry on through generations, but very clearly exists in biblical history and translated theology among many? Could you just clarify that a bit? I want to make sure I get your question right.

I don't want to say it the exact same way. I think you're right to say that Peterson generally has what I would call a pretty liberal approach to the biblical text. Yet at the same time, he emphasizes a very masculine theology.

And in his more modern translated work, tries to convince others that there is not a translated patriarchy from things like masculine theology, or even the biblical text itself, the biblical history. How can you reconcile those two things is, I think, the question I'm trying to get to. Some of you very clearly have a very liberal theology, but at the same time doesn't acknowledge the basic fact that in the biblical text, it's dominated by patriarchal theology.

Well, he's coming from a very unusual place. He's not developed in this particular liberal position from the same way that, I suppose, a typical Christian liberal theologian is not developed in that particular direction. And it's one of the ways in which his understanding of scripture comes with a force that those other approaches do not.

As regards his understanding of the patriarchy within that context, his approach is that of a classical liberal for the most part when he's thinking about society. And within that, I think he, on the one level, he believes that there is some sort of thing like the patriarchy.

He does not see it as necessarily a toxic thing in the same way as many would see it.

He sees it primarily in terms of just within the natural order of reality, how much we need to exist in dependence upon each other. And in a society prior to a very modern society with all the advancements in forms of government and welfare, in the advancements in the form of the economy and business, the movement from a more physical form of labor into working in front of desks and that sort of thing. Within that older form of reality, you just can't avoid a deep difference between the sexes as they play out in society.

But he emphasizes the fact that life has been a struggle for both men and women. It was not a cakewalk for either. And both depended greatly upon each other and needed to work for each other.

Now, as that plays into a more liberal scheme, I think within the modern setting, he talks about equality, I think a bit, maybe sometimes naive ways. As if just establishing an equal and supposedly level playing field will mean that women and men will achieve equal results in terms of things that traditionally play to male strengths. And a system that is very much built around male tendencies, that sort of thing.

That is a different thing from the theological approach that he's taking to the scripture, which has certain resemblances to a liberal theological approach. But it's not, the liberalism isn't directly related to the classical liberalism that you see in his political and social views. Not sure if that's answering your question though.

So, please come back and... Isn't part of it that he's saying, with the lobster thing being a cube, what he's saying is that hierarchies are human nature. If you don't have a hierarchy, your society will collapse. That's not a position, that's a fact.

It's a sociological, biological, all of them. And so what you have to do, okay, so you've got hierarchies, let's say the white nature. He would say, well you've got to have it, but is it becoming rigid, is it becoming a tyranny, right? He uses the word tyranny.

And if that happens, well then you've got to adjust it. And when he answers questions like this, when people say, hey, wait a minute, you mean to tell us that you're just going to let patriarchal oppressors succeed us? So his answer is, no, no, okay, yeah, patriarch is going to be there because it's natural. But, you can adjust it, make it work a little bit better, and take the repentance off so it doesn't become a tyranny.

Does that make sense? There's definitely an element of that in his argument, but I think he would say that certain hierarchies are oppressive, that they're wrong. And it's not just a matter of degree in some cases. So, for instance, if we're talking about slavery, that's not just a matter of degree.

There's something that's more fundamentally wrong with that and undermining the

dignity of the human being. Yet, also, it's, I think, important to think about hierarchy not just as a sort of top-down level on a single plane. Rather, he's thinking about many different people within society in a lot of different orders.

So, for instance, he talks about a more general game and then the many different games that we play. So, for instance, someone might be really good at certain athletic endeavors and yet not be at the top of the academic game. And there are many, many different academic games.

And there are ways that you can be playing primarily in the game that's largely by yourself. And the game you've won is the ability to do something very unique. But I think that concept of hierarchy for many people, I think, gives this notion of just one single game and everyone is in this competition rising to the top and pushing people down.

And that's not quite what he's saying. Any final questions? Thank you very much. Feel free to come up later on with any further questions you might have.

Not short of time.