

## 12 Rules by Jordan Peterson reviewed

Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist and a professor of psychology. He is very popular among people with more traditional outlooks.

He wrote the bestseller 12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos. It is a self-help book that tries to avoid the pitfalls of this subject by giving sound commonsense advice. God, remarkably, features significantly in this book. Unlike most self-help books, it warns that happiness is hard to hold on to and there are no guarantees. He has been accused of misogyny in his book.

His 12 rules are about not guaranteeing happiness but about putting no obstacles in its way.

His twelve rules have been summarised as

1. Stand up straight with your shoulders back
2. Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping
3. Make friends with people who want the best for you
4. Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today
5. Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them
6. Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world
7. Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)
8. Tell the truth – or, at least, don't lie
9. Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't
10. Be precise in your speech
11. Do not bother children when they are skateboarding
12. Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street

Anyway let us quote Peterson.

Quote: Cultivating judgment about the difference between virtue and vice is the beginning of wisdom, something that can never be out of date. By contrast, our modern relativism begins by asserting that making judgments about how to live is impossible, because there is no real good, and no true virtue (as these too are relative). Thus relativism's closest approximation to "virtue" is "tolerance." Only tolerance will provide social cohesion between different groups, and save us from harming each other. On Facebook and other forms of social media, therefore, you signal your so-called virtue, telling everyone how tolerant, open and compassionate you are, and wait for likes to accumulate. (Leave aside that telling people you're virtuous isn't a virtue, it's self-promotion. Virtue signalling is not virtue. Virtue signalling is, quite possibly, our commonest vice.) Intolerance of others' views (no matter how ignorant or incoherent they may be) is not simply wrong; in a world where there is no right or wrong, it is worse: it is a sign you are embarrassingly unsophisticated or, possibly, dangerous.

Comment: Relativism should ask why social cohesion matters if all is relative! Relativists are full of pride. If people who claim to know what is moral are bad they are worse. Relativists think they make things bad by thinking them bad. That is magic not morality.

Why is telling people you are virtuous not a virtue? Why is it self-promotion? If it is self-promotion disguised as virtue then it becomes deception as well.

Also tolerance if it is your only virtue is not really a virtue then. It is not virtuous to abandon and reject virtues in favour of one. It is vice.

Decide: morality is either really true (objective morality) or you can make it really true (relativism). Relativism trades objective morality for another objective morality that you make up. Pure relativists do not exist - they just are relativists when it suits them.

Quote: Nietzsche, for his part, posited that individual human beings would have to invent their own values in the aftermath of God's death. But this is the element of his thinking that appears weakest, psychologically: we cannot invent our own values, because we cannot merely impose what we believe on our souls.

Comment: So the implication is that we need God to impose it. But there is no such thing as God imposing. The truth is

that he can only ask us to impose them on ourselves.

If you invent God and it is possible everybody does it then you are still inventing your values. It is better to just invent them than to invent a God as an excuse for saying you don't invent them.

Values are inbuilt God or not as Peterson (despite himself) shows. Your values refuse to be treated as inventions. They want to be treated as the natural direction in which your personhood leans. You cannot make yourself fall in love and that goes for value as well.

Quote: An idea has an aim. It wants something. It posits a value structure. An idea believes that what it is aiming for is better than what it has now.

An idea is a personality, not a fact. When it manifests itself within a person, it has a strong proclivity to make of that person its avatar: to impel that person to act it out.

Comment: Ideas reflect the human tendency to think that all things are just getting that bit better. That is religion's selling point but it remains a non-religious matter. It is psychology - or human nature. Religion hijacks human nature. Religion is fundamentally a lie.

Peterson is right that we should not see an idea as a thing. It is a personality - it is what a personality gives birth to and makes part of itself. The warning is that we must be careful to be truthful and servants of truth for if your ideas are you then it follows that human nature will be unable to truthfully separate hating you from hating your ideas. It becomes another refutation of love the sinner but hate the sin. If hating sin and sinner is inevitable then you blame the sinner for being hated as well. You blame them not you.

If you are a channel for ideas you want to be a channel not a slave. You won't want your bad ideas to harm you or put you at risk. So investigation and revision of belief would be essential.

Quote: Each human being has an immense capacity for evil. Each human being understands, a priori, perhaps not what is good, but certainly what is not. And if there is something that is not good, then there is something that is good. If the worst sin is the torment of others, merely for the sake of the suffering produced— then the good is whatever is diametrically opposed to that. The good is whatever stops such things from happening.

Comment: Some feel that as our potential for evil is so big that is why even a small sin is no trivial matter. Protestantism says that all sin is an abomination before God. St Paul wrote that sin is in him even though he can find no trace of it when he examines himself but he knows it is there hiding itself. Jesus said that nobody is good only God.

According to our quote, our morality detectors are better for saying what is not good not what is good. That means that non-judgemental people are liars. They are at their core judges who think they know enough about everybody else's life to form a negative opinion of them or what they do. In reality judging somebody's deeds when you do not and cannot know the whole story is using their misdeeds or perceived misdeeds as a grounds for attacking them and sending "bad energy" to them.

Trying to be non-judgemental when it is not your nature or even possible is an act of violence and violence leads to violence. It may explain why "accepting" people turn on you fast when they find a more faddish bandwagon to get on. That is why religions of peace often surprise you when the climate is right for them to show their true colours.

Quote: Someone living a life-lie is attempting to manipulate reality with perception, thought and action, so that only some narrowly desired and pre-defined outcome is allowed to exist. A life lived in this manner is based, consciously or unconsciously, on two premises. The first is that current knowledge is sufficient to define what is good, unquestioningly, far into the future. The second is that reality would be unbearable if left to its own devices. The first presumption is philosophically unjustifiable. What you are currently aiming at might not be worth attaining, just as what you are currently doing might be an error. The second is even worse. It is valid only if reality is intrinsically intolerable and, simultaneously, something that can be successfully manipulated and distorted. Such speaking and thinking requires the arrogance and certainty that the English poet John Milton's genius identified with Satan, God's highest angel gone most spectacularly wrong. The faculty of rationality inclines dangerously to pride: all I know is all that needs to be known. Pride falls in love with its own creations, and tries to make them absolute.

Comment: Trying to create religious or whatever psychological crutches implies a terrible judgment is being cast on life, the world and the people you are one of! You blind yourself to seeing how good things actually are which is not a lot! We could have one of many possible explanations here for how religion tends to be so absolute and intolerant and malicious.

If people fall in love with their idols of pride such as their qualifications, their beauty or whatever then why can't God be an

idol too? We know for example that God is supposed to be absolute - that is of supreme significance. You cannot deep down think that your beauty or whatever is absolute - so it suffices for you to be absolute right now. Absolute and absolute right now are different but people treat them the same way. If there is a God that does not mean that the version you adore is not a creation that you are using to have a prideful absolute experience.

Quote: Every game has rules. Some of the most important rules are implicit. You accept them merely by deciding to play the game. The first of these rules is that the game is important. If it wasn't important, you wouldn't be playing it. Playing a game defines it as important. The second is that moves undertaken during the game are valid if they help you win. If you make a move and it isn't helping you win, then, by definition, it's a bad move. You need to try something different. You remember the old joke: insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results.

Comment: This shows how we can be the creators of a real morality. If our goal is that people will be as healthy in mind and body as possible then we can set out to play the morality game. It shows that we should be the creators of morality. Looking for a God to ground morality is dangerous and a waste of time. It is also dangerous merely by being a waste of time.

Quote: Reason is something alive. It lives in all of us. It's older than any of us. It's best understood as a personality, not a faculty. It has its aims, and its temptations, and its weaknesses. It flies higher and sees farther than any other spirit. But reason falls in love with itself, and worse. It falls in love with its own productions. It elevates them, and worships them as absolutes. Lucifer is, therefore, the spirit of totalitarianism.

Comment: Wrong - reason is a method. It is a faculty not a belief. We use reason - not believe in it. It does not care what we believe the same as your sight shows you all and does not care what you want to see. It is about working out what beliefs are the most likely to be true and avoiding contradictions. Dogmatists habitually claim that reason backs them up but they are usually lying and give reason a bad name. Peterson is risking demonising people who use reason with integrity. To them, their reason and rationality is very important and precious.

Quote: For the big lie, you first need the little lie. The little lie is, metaphorically speaking, the bait used by the Father of Lies to hook his victims.

Comment: That is why little lies are the worst. They muddy waters too and lead to errors.

Quote: Psychotherapy is not advice. Advice is what you get when the person you're talking with about something horrible and complicated wishes you would just shut up and go away. Advice is what you get when the person you are talking to wants to revel in the superiority of his or her own intelligence. If you weren't so stupid, after all, you wouldn't have your stupid problems.

Comment: Praying to God for guidance is an even bigger way of implying that suffering people have only themselves to blame.

Quote: Some argue—mistakenly—that Freud (often mentioned in these pages) contributed to our current longing for a culture, schools and institutions that are “non-judgmental.” It is true that he recommended that when psychoanalysts listen to their patients in therapy, they be tolerant, empathic, and not voice critical, moralistic judgments. But this was for the express purposes of helping patients feel comfortable in being totally honest, and not diminish their problems. This encouraged self-reflection, and allowed them to explore warded off feelings, wishes, even shameful anti-social urges. It also—and this was the masterstroke—allowed them to discover their own unconscious conscience (and its judgments), and their own harsh self-criticism of their “lapses,” and their own unconscious guilt which they had often hidden from themselves, but which often formed the basis of their low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. If anything, Freud showed that we are both more immoral and more moral than we are aware of. This kind of “non-judgmentalism,” in therapy, is a powerful and liberating technique or tactic—an ideal attitude when you want to better understand yourself. But Freud never argued (as do some who want all culture to become one huge group therapy session) that one can live one's entire life without ever making judgments, or without morality. In fact, his point in *Civilization and its Discontents* is that civilization only arises when some restraining rules and morality are in place.

Comment: That needs to be said. Society suffers from fascists who accuse others of judgementalism for showing any concern about the behavior of others and society. Those who shout the most about judgementalism are fundamentalist individualists. Yet they forget their individualism when person a judges person b though it is none of their business. They will judge a as a judgemental disgrace. The irony!

Quote: Absolute equality would therefore require the sacrifice of value itself—and then there would be nothing worth living for.

Comment: That may explain why equality activists are so intolerant! The reality is that a single mother who has never had

a proper boyfriend is not a model of romantic love the way a happily married woman would be. To make the two equal creates problems for both. The reality forbids it which is why activists seek to ignore reality or hope it will go away. But that cannot be done. They put transgender women in women's teams but the former ends up having an advantage. There is no way to be sure that the transgender through medical intervention can level the playing field with a natural born woman.

Quote: Perhaps ... it would be better not to be at all. Perhaps it would be even better if there was no Being at all. But people who come to the former conclusion are flirting with suicide, and those who come to the latter with something worse, something truly monstrous. They're consorting with the idea of the destruction of everything. They are toying with genocide—and worse. Even the darkest regions have still darker corners. And what is truly horrifying is that such conclusions are understandable, maybe even inevitable—although not inevitably acted upon. What is a reasonable person to think when faced, for example, with a suffering child? Is it not precisely the reasonable person, the compassionate person, who would find such thoughts occupying his mind? How could a good God allow such a world as this to exist? Logical they might be. Understandable, they might be. But there is a terrible catch to such conclusions. Acts undertaken in keeping with them (if not the thoughts themselves) inevitably serve to make a bad situation even worse.

Comment: Many who think it is better for nothing to exist may mean its a pity we are here but we are here now and always will have been here. That does not necessarily imply you have to want people destroyed. You just want them never to have come into existence. Some are reasoning from the fact that if you don't exist then there is nothing wrong or evil about preventing you from coming into existence. Others may reason that if you are here and should not be then you can be destroyed. But that is wrong for not being here at all ever is not the same as being here when you should be non-existent. You can prevent a baby from being conceived and that does it no harm but once it exists it is a different story. However you must be clear that if we are here and should not be though it does not give anybody permission or a duty to kill us it does ensure they will be lackluster that we are here.

He suggests that to say God should not allow anybody to suffer is to try to fight evil with evil. It is saying the person should be destroyed or never have existed as long as it means they never suffer. Hypothetically, what if suffering could be solved by simply not existing or being destroyed? That is saying that suffering is worse than not existing. If that is true then the risk of suffering is worse than not existing. So it calls for you not to exist if there is a reasonable chance that you might suffer. What about the idea that if there is a God who lets you suffer then you are better off not coming into existence?

OVERALL I find the book insightful and interesting. It just gives us ideas that need teasing out and deeper reflection. This is what I have tried to do and highly recommend the book.

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