

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
ASPEN IDEAS FESTIVAL 2018

Jordan Peterson:
From the Barricades of the Culture Wars

TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 2018
ST. REGIS HOTEL BALLROOM

Speakers:
Jordan Peterson
Bari Weiss

Bari Weiss:

So I assume you're all here to talk about the early work of Carl Jung and this man's carnivorous diet and the Soviet art he collects. No. In all seriousness, I'm really excited to be here with you. We've never met before. Your official title is that you are a clinical psychologist and a professor at the University of Toronto. You've written two books, one called Maps of Meaning, and the best-selling 12 Rules for Life, which is currently being translated into 40 languages. But this description does not capture what you've become, which is a kind of phenomenon.

When I was reading 12 Rules for Life in a café, in the locker room of my gym, it was sitting out on a bench. People were coming up to me and saying, "This book saved my life." And yet, there are other people in the country, including some of my fellow journalists who insists that you are actually a gateway drug to the far right. So, I'm excited to be here with you, not the [mis-siv 00:01:03] you, but with the man. I'm hoping we can use this hour or so to talk about your views on meaning, on gender, on feminism, God, higher education, and I'm sure we can solve all of that in under an hour.

So, I want to start with the book 12 Rules for Life, which I'm hoping some of you have read. Here are some of the messages in that book. Gender isn't a social construct. People should strive for meaning in their lives, not happiness. Life is suffering, but there are ways to transcend it. Stand up straight, make your bed. Now, all of this, to me, seems pretty commonsensical. And yet, I don't think that there is a Canadian in the world that I've read more think pieces about. I don't think it's a stretch to say that you are the most loved and loathed public intellectual in the Western world at the moment.

So, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what that's like and your understanding of it. You've just come from two days in Vancouver, where with on an event with Sam Harris, talking for over two hours about the question of truth, and 5,000 people showed up to those events. Not exactly a sexy Beyonce concert. What's going on? How do you understand it and your place in it?

Jordan Peterson:

Well I think you don't want to underestimate the role that technological transformation is playing in this. I've been thinking about YouTube and podcasts quite intensely for about two years. So, I started putting my university lectures on YouTube in 2013. I did that for a variety of reasons, mostly curiosity, because ... and the drive to learn. I've found that if I want to learn a technology, the best way to do it is to use it. I'm always learning new technologies because, well, not that that makes me particularly unique.

I had some success with my lectures on public television in Canada. So, I did some lectures with a series called Big Ideas on Canadian public television. There's about 200 of those lectures and I did five of them. 200 done by 200 different people, but I did five of them. They were regularly in the top 10 of the most viewed lectures. I knew there was some broader market for, let's say, ideas, and I thought, "Well I might as well put my lectures up on YouTube and

see what happens." Then by April of 2016, I had a million views, and I thought, "Huh. The only reason people are watching these is because they want to watch them, because they're actually really hard."

A million of something is a lot. If you sell a million copies of your book ... Well first of all, that never happens, right? I mean, it's very, very rare. You're very happy. You never have your scientific papers cited a million times. You rarely have a million dollars. It's a very large number and I thought-

Bari Weiss: Well this room excepted but-

Jordan Peterson: Well fair enough. Fair enough.

Bari Weiss: Sorry guys.

Jordan Peterson: It is of course, it's not as uncommon as it once was, but it's still a significant number, and I didn't really have any way of calibrating that. I thought, "Well what am I supposed to do now that I hit a million views? How am I supposed to conceptualize that? What is this YouTube thing anyways that was once a repository for cute cat videos? What does it mean to have a million views on it?" I thought. And so, I really started to think about it because there were a lot of people commenting as well, and they were into the lectures and following them avidly.

I thought, "Okay, so, what is this YouTube exactly?" I thought, "Well for the first time in human history, the spoken word has the same reach as the written word. And not only that, no lagged publication and no barrier to entry. That's a major technological revolution. That's a Gutenberg revolution. That's a big deal. This is a game-changer." Then it was soon after that that I discovered the podcast world, which is about 10 times as big as the YouTube world. The podcast world is also a Gutenberg revolution, except it's even more extensive, because the problem with books and videos is that you can't do anything else while you're doing them, right?

When you're reading, you're reading. When you're watching a video, you can be distracted, but you have to pay attention to the video. But if you're listening to a podcast, you can be driving a forklift or a long-haul truck, or you can be exercising or doing the dishes. And so, what that means is that podcasts free up, say, two hours a day for people to engage in educational activities that they wouldn't otherwise be able to engage in and that's about one-eighth of people's lives. So, podcasts hand people one-eighth of their life back to engage in high-level education.

Then I thought, "Well people actually want to do this. There's a massive market for high-level intellectual engagement that's much deeper and more desperate, let's say, than anyone's suspected." We really saw that in Vancouver. I mean, the discussion I had with Sam Harris, the two discussions, we talked about the

relationship between facts and values, was really that ... and science and religion more peripherally. But the dialogue was conducted at the level I would say, approximately at the level of a pretty rigorous PhD defense.

We were only supposed to talk for an hour and then go to QA, but the crowd didn't want us to stop. And so, we talked the first night for two and a half hours and the second night for two and a half hours, and the crowd was 100% onboard the entire time. It wasn't because Sam was winning or I was winning. Neither of us in fact were trying to win. We were trying to learn something, and we were actually trying to learn something. We weren't just pretending to do that. The place erupted at the end. I think one of the things I've realized in the last couple of days, as I've been thinking this through, is that the narrow bandwidth of TV has made us think we're stupider than we are.

And so, people have a real hunger for deep intellectual dialogue, and that can be met with these new technologies, and that has revolutionary significance, and that's starting to unfold.

Bari Weiss: I wonder about ... You love to quote this line, this nichey line that, anyone who has a why to live for can endure almost any how.

Jordan Peterson: Yep.

Bari Weiss: What's your why? What is driving you? You are the most busy man ... I mean, to get you here, I think you were in Portland, wherever you were last night in Portland, tomorrow ... Like, I don't know how you're alive frankly right now. What is driving you? What is this relentless drive? What are you pushing toward?

Jordan Peterson: Well when I spent 15 years writing the first book I wrote, which is called Maps of Meaning, and it's akin to 12 Rules of Life, although it's a much more difficult book. The audio version of that book is out now by the way. It's been out since June 12th. If you liked 12 rules or you were interested in it, then you could try that. I think the audio version is much more accessible, because it's a difficult book. Getting the cadences of the sentences right is an aid to comprehension. I spent 15 years writing that book, about three hours a day writing, and a lot more time reading.

I was interested in solving a problem, which was, I was interested in the great atrocities of the 20th century, the ones that were committed on the right and the ones that were committed on the left. But I was interested in that psychologically. What that meant was, had I been there, what could have I done to not participate? And so, that's what I've been trying to figure out. Because for me, what happened in Nazi Germany and what happened in the Gulag Archipelago and in Maoist China, many places, was sufficient definition of hell. Convincing, as well.

I wanted to understand what the opposite of that was, and not sociologically or politically or economically, because I think that in the final analysis, those levels of explanation are insufficient. But psychologically, how is it that you must conduct yourself in the world so that if the opportunity to participate in such things arises, you won't? When the Holocaust museums went up, there was a motto that went along with them, which was, "Never forget." I thought, "Yeah, fair enough, but you can't remember what you don't understand. And so, I wanted to understand it." But I wanted to understand it.

You see, when people read history, they either read it as a detached observer, or they tend to read it as, well, maybe the heroic protagonist. People like to imagine that they would be Schindler in Schindler's List, but that's wrong. So because the probability that you'll be the perpetrator is much higher, especially merely the perpetrator who's ensconced in silence when silence is not the appropriate thing. I wanted to ... having figured out what constituted hell and the pathway to that, which would be, I suppose, the cowardice and resentment that produces either complicitness in those events or failure to oppose them when they emerge.

I wanted to understand what the opposite of that was, because I think that's what needs to be learned from what happened in the 20th century. And so, that's why I wrote Maps of Meaning, was to understand that and to lay out what the opposite was. Then that turned out to be extremely helpful to me and then to the people I started to teach about that, because it's useful to know what the opposite of hell is. I've been teaching those things to people since 1993. That's 25 years. The response from the students has always been the same sort of response that I'm getting now, absent some of the negative characterizations let's say, which have emerged-

Bari Weiss: Let's say.

Jordan Peterson: ... for particular reasons. But the students have always said one of two things, and this is the vast majority of them. This isn't cherry-picked responses. It's been the same everywhere. They tell me ... and this is the same response I get from my audiences now, too, is, they say, "You've given me words to explain and understand things that I always knew to be true," or, "I was in a very dark place for one of the seven reasons that people might be in a dark place — alcohol or drugs or failure of relationships or lack of vision or nihilism or hopelessness or depression or anxiety." You know, all the pitfalls that people can encounter.

And, "I've been developing a vision for my life and trying to adopt responsibility and trying to be careful with what I say, and things are way better," and that's what drives me. It's so interesting watching what's happening because you said I'm the most loathed and the most loved man. It's like I'm loathed by a very small percentage of very noisy people. There are people who either don't or haven't or won't or take a look at what I'm doing, partly because it doesn't fit within their conceptual scheme. Whenever I'm interviewed by journalists that

have the scent of blood in their nose, let's say, they're very willing and able to characterize the situation I find myself in as political.

But that's because they can't see the world in any other manner than political, and the political is a tiny fraction of the world, and what I'm doing isn't political. It's psychological or philosophical or theological. The political element is peripheral. If people come to the live lectures, let's say, that's absolutely self-evident. That's not what they're about. That isn't why people are there. That isn't what they talk to me about afterwards. It's fundamentally irrelevant. The only reason this ever became political is because in Canada, our provincial and federal governments had the unspeakable arrogance to propose compelled speech legislation in a British common law system, where that had never been done ever even once, and despite the fact that your Supreme Court in 1942 made such things unconstitutional.

Bari Weiss: Could you explain to people here what actually happened? Which is that you opposed this law, which was going to compel you, you say, to use preferred pronouns of people that are transgendered. Is that accurate?

Jordan Peterson: It's accurate, but partial. So there's provincial laws that were already in place to compel this sort of thing, but a federal law had been generated. I went and read the policy guidelines within which the federal law was to be interpreted, and those were produced by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which is a radical, leftist inquisition, fundamentally. They had documented out a very large number of policies that were that it would make anyone's sensible hair stand on end if they read them, which they didn't, but I did.

Not only did I read them, I understood them. And having read them and understood them, I made videos. Just one night, I got up at about 3:00 in the morning, because it was really bothering me for a variety of complicated reasons, including the fact that a number of my clinical clients had been bullied into states of ill mental health by radical social justice warriors at their various workplaces. This was long before I was embroiled in any of this controversy by the way, so it wasn't a sampling bias.

At the same time, the university, my university, had the gall, the unmitigated gall to mandate unconscious bias retraining for their human resources staff, despite the fact that unconscious bias measurements are not reliable or valid, even by the testimony of their formulators, and despite the evidence that there's no data whatsoever lending unconscious bias retraining programs, even the vaguest shred of credible outcome. So I made these videos because I was annoyed about this, and I thought, "Well what will happen if I make a video?"

Bari Weiss: So this is one of the things that I feel ... or maybe you can answer it for us. I feel because of this incident, you are often characterized, at least in the mainstream press, as being transphobic. If you had a student come to you, and they said to

you, "I was born female. I, now, identify as male. I want you to call me by male pronouns," would you say yes to that?

Jordan Peterson: Well it would depend on the student and the context and why I thought they were asking me and what I believe their demand actually characterized in all of that, because that can be done in a way that's genuine and acceptable, in a way that's manipulative and unacceptable. If it was genuine and acceptable, then I'd have no problem with it. If it was manipulative and unacceptable, then not a chance. You might think, "Well who am I to judge?"

Bari Weiss: And how do you tell?

Jordan Peterson: Well, first of all, I am a clinical psychologist-

Bari Weiss: I know that.

Jordan Peterson: ... and I've talked to people for about 25,000 hours. I'm responsible for judging how I'm going to use my words. I judge it the same way that I judge all the interactions that I have with people, which is to the best of my ability and characterized by all the errors that I'm prone to. So, I'm not saying that my judgment would be unerring, but I have to live with the consequences, so I'm willing to accept the responsibility. But also to be clear about this, that never happened. I never refused to call anyone by anything that they had asked me to call them by.

And so, although that's been reported multiple times, it's a complete falsehood, and it did have nothing to do with the transgender issue as far as I was concerned. And besides that if it had only to do with the transgender issue in Canada, the probability that this would have had the impact that it had is zero. So, that wasn't about that at all. It was about something far more far deeper and far more insidious, and everyone knew it, which is why it didn't go away. What should have happened is there should have been a bit of controversy around it, maybe even a protest, and everyone's attention should have gone away like a week later, and that didn't happen even a little bit.

So there's more going on here than as I knew. There's far more going on here than this little bill would have revealed.

Bari Weiss: One of your rules in 12 Rules for Life is ... I hope I'm getting this right ... choose your words carefully. It'd be ironic if I got that one wrong.

Jordan Peterson: Be precise in your speech.

Bari Weiss: Okay. Be precise in your speech.

Jordan Peterson: Which is, you know, you got it right.

Bari Weiss: Okay, sort of.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah, well you got the gist of it. THAT's the crucial thing.

Bari Weiss: One of the things that's happened to you in the past two years is that every utterance of yours, and Caitlyn alluded to this in her introduction, is analyzed, maybe manipulated. How do you live with that reality? How do you even have the confidence to sort of continue, from my perspective, rush into the breach on all sorts of what have become third-rail issues, knowing that so much of what you say is going to be mischaracterized? And then I have a follow-up to that.

Jordan Peterson: Well, I mean, about 25 years ago, 30 years ago, maybe 1985. I guess that's how far long ago was that. It's a long time.

Bari Weiss: Some years.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah. I decided that I was going to be very careful with what I said, like I noticed ... When I was thinking through some of these ideas that I already described, trying to understand what tilted people towards vengefulness and cruelty ... I was contemplating that personally. You know, "What would tilt me towards that? Or what did tell me towards that?" At the same time, I developed what would you call an acute awareness of my speech. It was part of ... because I'd ask to question it. When you ask yourself a question, if it's you really ask a question, as you start thinking up the answer, whether you want to think it up or not, and the answer that you might generate might bear very little resemblance to the answer that you would like to generate.

I'd ask myself a question, which was, well, what's the pathway out of this hell? Let's say. And, how might I be tangled up in that? One of the things I started to realize was that I wasn't very careful with what I said and that seemed in some way to be related to that. It's not surprising because it's not really obvious that the Nazis for example were all that careful about what they said in terms of its relationship to the truth, quite the contrary, and the same with the ideologues in the Soviet Union. The idea that there was some relationship between carelessness and speech, lies and deception and that thing or self-aggrandizement, or any of the things that you can indulge in if you're careless with your speech, and the weakening of your character to the point where you might get tangled up in great and terrible sociological movements.

That seemed to me to be reasonable. Many people had commented on that, like Solzhenitsyn, for example. And so, I started to experience discomfort with what I was saying. What seemed to happen was that I started to realize and could feel it. I was reading Carl Rogers at the same time, and he actually suggested that psychotherapists pay attention to exactly this sort of thing. I started to understand that many of the things I was saying weren't true. I didn't really believe them. They weren't really my thoughts. They made me feel weak when I said them.

Bari Weiss: Can you give an example?

Jordan Peterson: That's a good question. Can I give you an example? Oh maybe I would engage in an argument with someone at a bar on an intellectual issue for the purpose of displaying my intellectual superiority or at least hypothetically displaying it, you know? So sometimes people like to argue, and they like to argue, because, hypothetically, they would like to win.

Bari Weiss: So you don't mean though that you were mouthing platitudes?

Jordan Peterson: Oh sure. I was doing that.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah, definitely. Oh yes, all the time, and sometimes they weren't even platitudes. They might have been things that I picked up in books that weren't cliches. But they weren't mine. I didn't have any right to them. Just because you read something doesn't mean you have a right to it. You have to understand it. Understanding something that's deep means a deep transformation, means you have to live it. And so, just because you know a philosophical concept and you can say it doesn't give you the right to utter it as if it's yours. You have to earn that.

I was a smart kid, and so, my head was full of ideas that I hadn't earned and I could lay them out, but that doesn't mean they were mine or me. And so, there was a falsity in expressing them. I couldn't tell for a while because I would say things and part of me would be all critical about what I was saying. "You don't believe that. That's not accurate. It's kind of a lie." They were saying that to almost everything I said and I took a risk. I thought, "Okay, I'm going to assume that the part of me that's critical about what I'm saying is right," even though that was terrible because really often it meant I could hardly speak.

Then I learned to only say things that didn't make me feel weak. Then I decided that that's what I was going to do. So I've been careful with what I've been saying for a long time, but-

Bari Weiss: I'm having a hard time with what you're saying right now, because shouldn't the test be, "I'm only saying things that are true," not, "I'm only saying things that don't make me feel weak"? What am I misunderstanding in that formulation?

Jordan Peterson: Well what you're misunderstanding in part is, how do you know the things that you're saying aren't true? I would say, one of the ways you know is that they weaken you, and you can learn that. You can learn to feel that. Carl Rogers talked about this a lot in his work in psychotherapy. He said that one of the primary roles of a psychotherapist was to be congruent. What he meant by that was that there was no disjunction between what you felt in a situation, let's say,

and what you said, that it was all one piece, and that was an embodied unity, not merely a conceptual unity. So, I really do think that there's something to it.

Bari Weiss: So you almost mean psychologically weak, not weak in terms of power?

Jordan Peterson: I mean psychologically weak.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah, yeah. I mean, morally weak. I mean, weak in character. That sort of thing. Yeah, that's what I mean. And so, I got very careful with what I said. At the same time, I was spending a tremendous amount of time writing. I was very careful what I wrote. So in Maps of Meaning, I think I rewrote every sentence in that book at least 50 times. And every sentence I-

Bari Weiss: That's crazy.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah, well that's for sure.

Bari Weiss: Sorry. That's crazy.

Jordan Peterson: Oh yeah, that's for sure. You know, I'd take the sentence out and then I'd write a bunch of variants of it, and then I would pick the variant that was best, and then I would try to come up with all the arguments I could about why this sentence was stupid and wrong.

Bari Weiss: Please don't tell me you still do this.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah, I still do this when I'm writing.

Bari Weiss: Okay. Did you do that 15 versions of every sentence in 12 Rules for Life also?

Jordan Peterson: I said, "50."

Bari Weiss: Oh 50. Excuse me. I meant to be precise in my speech, but I misheard.

Jordan Peterson: It was more like 15 with 12 Rules for Life, so it was less, but I'm a better writer than I was then. So I didn't have to do it quite as often. I kept writing it until I couldn't make the sentences any better. That doesn't mean they were good. It just meant that I got to the point where if I was rewriting them, it wasn't obvious that the rewrite was better than the original sentence. So then I had to stop.

Bari Weiss: My question of a few minutes ago was, how has knowing that your words are going to be sort of intentionally torqued, how has that changed you?

Jordan Peterson: Well it's made me even more careful.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: It's exaggerated the care. I had been quite careful and the evidence for that is quite clear. So when all of this political controversy surrounded me and that swirled around me, well it still is. Maybe it's even exaggerated to some degree, but it was very intense in Canada for a good six months, and people were going over what I had put on YouTube, with a fine-tooth comb. There was 200 hours of videos there, and you think, "Well with some creative editing and with motivation in mind, you think if you went over 200 hours of someone's lectures, you could find a smoking pistol even if you had to chop out a sentence."

No one found anything. The reason for that was there wasn't anything there. That's why they didn't find it. And so, I had already been very careful, and I discussed all sorts of unbelievably contentious issues because my classes were very intense. Like the Maps of Meaning class, in particular, is like ... Its basic presupposition, partly what I was trying to do with my students was to convince them that had they been in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, they wouldn't have been on the side of the good, right? That's a hell of a thing to drag people through.

But it's statistically overwhelmingly likely. So, it was a very serious class and certainly a place where you could step badly at any given moment. I talked about gender differences and the biological substructure of consciousness and all these things that could easily become politically contentious, but as I said, there weren't any smoking pistols. But now, for the last two years, I've been even more careful, and I have people watching me. I mean, my family watches me, and what I'm doing, they keep very careful track of it.

If I deviate a little bit from what they think from how I should have behaved, then they tell me, and I have friends who are doing the same thing and I listen to them.

Bari Weiss: Do you feel that you deviated from how you should behave when you said of ... I think it was Mishra in The New York Review of Books that-

Jordan Peterson: No.

Bari Weiss: Well let me just share what you said, which is-

Jordan Peterson: Okay.

Bari Weiss: I'm trying to be precise in my speech, but I believe you said, "You're ... " What did you say? That if you were a sanctimonious prick, and if you were in the room ...

Jordan Peterson: I said, "You're a sanctimonious prick, and if you were here, I'd slap you."

Bari Weiss: Yeah, so you don't regret that?

Jordan Peterson: Not a bit.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: I'll tell you why.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: Well, look. It's really complicated. I have this friend who's a native carver, and he comes from a very rough background, like way rougher than you think. Maybe some of you have come from rough backgrounds or you know people who've come from them. But he comes from a plenty rough background. I started working with him, buying his art 15 years ago. He was a survivor of residential schools in Canada, and we got pretty close. He helped me design the third floor of my house. Anyways, the long and short of it was that I got inducted into his family about two, a year and a half ago, this big ceremony up in a native reservation, in northern Vancouver.

We've been through a lot together, and a lot of it's been pretty rough. This whatever the hell his name was Mishra or whatever the hell his name was, had the temerity to say that I was romancing the noble savage. It's like, "Watch your step, buddy. You don't know what the hell you're talking about, not even a bit." So, had I been a left-leaning what? Personage and he had made a comment like that, there would have been hell to pay. So, which isn't to say that I'm a right-leaning personage by the way. So I don't regret it a bit. I think that what he said was absolutely reprehensible and that he should have been called out on it. And so, I don't regret it at all.

Now, people said, "Maybe it would have been better for me not to have made that comment, and it's possible that they're right." But I actually thought about it. I thought, "There's no excuse for that. You don't know what you're talking about. You're meddling with things you don't understand, and you're making a casual aspersion not only on me, but on my noble, savage friend." It's like, "Yeah, no."

Bari Weiss: So speaking of things that people have said to defame you, you're currently suing Wilfrid Laurier University, because, I believe ... You'll correct me if I'm wrong. But I think administrators there in their meeting with Lindsay Shepherd who was a TA who showed a clip of you. They interrogated her, accusing her of creating a hostile teaching environment for showing a clip of you in her classroom. And during that interaction, which she recorded, they compared you to Hitler.

Jordan Peterson: No. They compared me to Hitler or Milo Yiannopoulos.

Bari Weiss: Excuse me.

Jordan Peterson: Right? No, it's important.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: The reason it's important is because ... Look, these people, one of them was-

Bari Weiss: Sorry. Just to finish that question, and maybe you'll braid this in. You were one of the most outspoken champions, I would say, of free speech right now. I would like for you, if you can, to grapple a bit with believing in free speech so strongly and yet also suing this university for slander.

Jordan Peterson: So first of all, they compared me to ... They said, "Playing a clip of Jordan Peterson was like playing a clip of Hitler or Milo Yiannopoulos." I thought, "Well let's go a little easy on the Hitler comparisons there."

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:31:04]

Jordan Peterson: And I thought well gets a little easy on the Hitler comparisons there, guys. We might want to save that for when it's really necessary. Because you don't use ... It's sacrilegious to use an insult like that except in situations where it's justified. It's not appropriate to use a catastrophe like that casualty, especially when you're doing under the guise of moral virtue. There's no excuse for it.

And then the second thing is you're a professor, both of you. Get your damn words straight. Which is it? My Hitler or my Yiannopoulos. Seriously. Those are not the same people, in case you didn't notice. One of them was the worst barbarian in the 20th century, with the possible exception of Stalin and Mao. And the other one is a provocateur, trickster who's quick on his feet, and is, what would you say, is stirring things up in a relatively non problematic way. There not the same creature. And so to combine them in a single careless insult during an administrative investigation, which was entirely unwarranted by the way, and was predicated on an absolute lie, there hadn't been a student complaint as the university admitted. There's no excuse for that. And if they weren't professors, they well it wouldn't have been so bad. But they were. And the reason that I sued them, there's a whole bunch of reasons. The Hitler comparison and the Milo Yiannopoulos comparison were only two of about 40 things that they tarred me with. And they're all listed in the deposition.

The only reason I brought the lawsuit forward seven months later or something like that, was because of what happened with Lindsay Shepherd. What happened to her at Wilfrid Laurier is absolutely inexcusable. Everything they did to her was predicated on a lie. Then the university apologized, and so did the professor, and then he lied during his apology, which was a forced apology anyways, and therefore of very little utility. There were subject to no disciplinary action even though the statute of the university required it. And

they made Lindsay Shepherd's life a living hell, even after they apologized to her and told her that she did nothing wrong, and that they hadn't followed their own procedures. I read her deposition, and I actually read it on YouTube, where it's got about 500 thousand views by the way, and I thought you people haven't learned anything. You've learned absolutely nothing. And so if one lawsuit doesn't convince you, maybe two will.

And then with regards to free speech, it's like free speech is still bounded inside a structure of law, and these people broke the law, at least that's my claim. I don't see the contradiction there at all. You can't just slander someone, defame them, lie about them. You can't insight people to crime. There's all sorts of reasonable restrictions on free speech that are already codified essentially in the British Common Law System. But Wilfrid Laurier learned nothing. But this isn't over yet.

Bari Weiss: But isn't it creating a chilling effect which is something that those of us care so much about free speech want to sort of stay away from. You could say that these sort of defamation lawsuits are a really, really dangerous slippery slope. I'm sort of surprised that you don't see it that way.

Jordan Peterson: Well, you know, I do see it that way, which is why I spent seven months thinking about it before I started to do it. But I thought that there's always risk in every decision. There's the risk of doing something, and there's the risk of not doing something. And both of those risks usually catastrophic in every decision you make in life. It's like I weighed up the risks, and I thought, "Nope." The risk here of not doing something is greater than the risk of doing something. And had they shown any sign ... Look. One of the things that Wilfrid Laurier did in the aftermath of this scandal, which by the way was the biggest scandal that ever hit a Canadian university by a large margin, and it was an international scandal. I rarely go places where people haven't heard about this. And so it was a big deal. And they had plenty to learn. And they learned nothing. They set up a panel hypothetically to clarify their position on free speech, and it's relationship to inclusivity, etc., and the only two people on the panel who were advocating for the free speech position, resigned in frustration. And I know that because I know who they are. And well that's just one of the pieces of evidence that they didn't learn anything.

And then they continued to mistreat Shepherd continually. Her deposition, it's like a novel of stupidity. And my sense was had there been any sign whatsoever of apology and procedural rectification, that she would have left them alone, and so would have I. But there was zero. In fact, if anything, what they did was double down and go underground. Here's our apology. Here's our procedures. That's what they showed the world. Here's how nothing at all has changed. It's like, no. Not good enough.

Bari Weiss: Since we're on the subject of universities, you recently said that what universities have done is beyond forgiveness. I wonder if you can explain what

you mean by that, and a second connected question is should we, I'll put it starkly, should we abolish universities? Or-

Jordan Peterson: No, they'll do that themselves.

Bari Weiss: Okay. Let's hear a little bit about what they've done that you think renders them beyond forgiveness.

Jordan Peterson: Well, they're overwhelmingly administratively top heavy. And they don't spend any more money on the faculty than they did 30 years ago. And the cost of that administrative top heaviness, which is well documented, not by me, by other people, and it's been accelerating over the last 20 years, has been a radical increase tuition fees, especially compared to the radical decrease in price of most things over the last 20 years. Now, they've become administratively top heavy, and this is especially true in the United States. The way that's been managed is that unsuspecting students are given free access to student loans that will cripple them through their 30's and their 40's. And the universities are enticing them to extend their carefree adolescence for a four year period, at the cost of mortgaging their future earnings, in a deal that does not allow for escape through bankruptcy.

It's essentially a form of indentured servitude. There's no excuse whatsoever for that. It means that the administrators have learned how to pick the future pockets of their students. And because they also view them in some sense as sacred cash cows and fragile, let's say, because you might wonder why the students are being treated like they're so fragile. Well, we don't want them to drop out now, do we? And if they drop out, we don't get our hands on their future earnings in a way that they can't escape from. And that cripples the economy because the students come out overladen with debt that they'll never pay off, right at the time when they should be at the peak of their ability to take entrepreneurial risks, so they can't do that because they're too crippled by debt, and so that's absolutely appalling.

They're gerrymandering the accreditation processes, so that the degree no longer has its credible value. They're enabling the activist's disciplines, which have zero credibility whatsoever in my estimation, and I'm perfectly willing to defend that claim. And by enabling the activists disciplines, they're allowing for the distribution of this absolutely nonsensical view that western society is fundamentally a patriarchal tyranny, which is absurd on at least five dimensions of analysis, but is becoming the thing you have to believe if you're allowed to speak in public. Well, what else, that's a good start. They're not teaching students to read critically. They're not introducing them to great literature. They're not teaching them to write. It's like the list goes on and on and on.

Bari Weiss: Do you think in a way that you are a symbol of higher education's failure? Meaning, the reason, maybe, that people are showing up, 5000 people to listen to you, it's going to be 20 thousand in London in July, is because they're aren't

that many people who unironically are talking about what it is to live a good life, and asking questions about how to live a meaningful one. If you would say that in most universities, I feel that you would be laughed out of the room.

Jordan Peterson: Well, it would depend on how you said it and to whom. But if you say it to students, then they're so happy to listen to you that they can hardly stand it. Because even the most cynical students come to university hoping that they're something there worth learning. And the reason that they're exposed to great literature, for example, because there is such a thing, it's not all power claims, is because great literature contains the key to wisdom, and you need wisdom in order to live without undue suffering.

Yes, I mean ... What I say that's what happened to me is a reflection of the failure of the universities. It is in part, although I did teach-

Bari Weiss: Not just you. The whole intellectual dark web. The fact that people listen to Sam Harris talk for hours, and all of these people that [crosstalk 00:40:36].

Jordan Peterson: Well, I think you want to go for the simple solutions, before you go for the complex ones. And you want to go for the solutions that are associated with ignorance rather than malevolence first. I would say that we don't to underestimate the degree to which what's happening in YouTube and with podcasts, as the consequence of a technological revolution. I've known for years that the universities under serve the community, because for some reason we think that university education is for 18 to 22 year olds, which is a proposition that's so absurd that it's absolutely mind boggling that anyone ever conceptualized it. It's like why wouldn't you take university courses throughout your entire life? I mean, what you stop looking for wisdom when you're 22. You don't even start, usually, until you're in your mid 20s. I knew the universities were under serving the broader community a long time ago. But, there wasn't a mechanism whereby that could be rectified, apart from say books, and of course that was part of the rectification.

I think you don't want to underestimate the technological transformation. And then I would also say ... I was teaching this in university. So, it isn't like there isn't anybody in university still teaching this sort of thing. There are plenty of qualified professors who are still doing a good job, but they're being pushed out very rapidly, and terrified, as well, by the activist disciplines.

Bari Weiss: You speak and write a lot about how masculinity is in crisis. What are some of the main signs of it, and then we'll open it up to questions soon. And is Trump a symbol of that crisis, or a corrective to it?

Jordan Peterson: Well, I don't really think that masculinity is in crisis. I think that to the degree that masculinity perse is regarded as toxic, that that will produce a crisis, which isn't the same thing. I think there's a crisis of meaning in our culture, but that's not new. That's been the case for quite a long time. But I don't think it's specific

to masculinity. That's been a story that kind of aggregated around me. And the way that happened was well the people who don't like what I'm saying look at my audience and say, "Well, he's speaking mostly to men, therefore he must be speaking to men." It's like well no. The baseline rates for YouTube utilization is about 80% male. The fact that most of the people who are watching me on YouTube were male is an artifact to some degree of the fact that most of the people who watch YouTube are male. Now, it may also be that the sorts of things that I'm saying are more pertinent to men, although I'm not convinced of that. Most of my students throughout my university career have been women because psychology is dominated by women to a great degree. And ever since I published my book, the proportion of people who are coming to my lectures that is female is reliably increasing. It's probably up to about 35% I would say now from about probably 20.

I don't think it's a message that's particularly germane to men, although is germane to men, and I don't think that there's an independent crisis of masculinity. There might be a crisis of concepts of masculinity, and I think that's hard on young men in some ways, and the reason for that is you're supposed to be duty bound as a virtuous person to buy the doctrine of the tyrannical patriarch. It's like, well look. First of all, every hierarchical system tends towards tyranny. That's a universal truism. And our structures have the same problem obviously, and we have to be eternally vigilant so that they don't devolve into tyranny, but that doesn't mean that they are tyrannies, and always have been, and also, of course, compared to what? Compared to your hypothetical ideological utopia? Yes. Compared to every other society that's ever existed on the planet, including most of the ones that exist now? Definitely not.

But anyways if you buy that idiot unidimensional idea which is a pathological error, and you see your culture as a tyrannical patriarchy, and then you see any attempt to move up that hierarchy as a manifestation of patriarchal tyranny. Now the problem is a lot of the ways that you move up a modern functional hierarchy is through competence, and if you take young men, it doesn't happen as much with young women for reasons we can go into, but if you take young men, and you say, "Every manifestation of your desire to move up the hierarchy is nothing but proof of your participation in the tyrannical patriarchy." Then you tend to demoralize them, which is exactly what you're trying to do by the way if take that stance to begin with, because I really think at the bottom of the most pathological manifestations of the collectivist dictum is an assault on the idea of competence itself. And that's another unforgivable sin that the university has committed.

There's no doubt that human hierarchies are error prone, and they tilt towards tyranny. Obviously. But that doesn't mean that they are unidimensionally patriarchal tyrannies. They're neither patriarchal nor tyrannies. But that's received wisdom now. To question it means that you're a misogynist fascist. So, well. I tell young men, "No, no, no, no, no." There's something to competence, man.

Bari Weiss: Speaking as a woman who has read your book, and I'm with you for so much of it, and then you start to lose me when you talk about archetypes. The way you talk about archetypes in the book, and again, forgive me if I'm being slightly imprecise, but I'm trying to gloss it for an audience who might not have read it, is that in this Jungian archetype world, chaos is feminine, order is masculine, and the subtitle to your book is an antidote to chaos. As a woman reading that, I'd like for you to explain to me maybe what I'm missing there, because that's when you started to lose me a little bit as a reader. Why does there need to be an antidote to the feminine in that way?

Jordan Peterson: Well, there has to be an antidote to anything that's manifesting itself in excess, and it's chaos that's manifesting itself in excess at the moment in our culture. And so, that's what I decided to address in this book, and mostly that was because, I suppose, it was addressed at least in part to younger people, and what younger people have to contend with generally speaking is an excess of chaos because there's not very disciplined. We kind of have this idea that well you're free as a child, and then you, let me see if I can put this properly, that you have a certain delightful, wonderful, positive freedom as a child, and then that's given up as you approach adulthood, but the truth of the matter is that you have a lot of potential as a child, but none of that is capable of manifesting itself as freedom before you become disciplined. And discipline is the matter of the imposition of order, and the order is necessary, especially for people who are hopeless and nihilistic.

And lots of people are hopeless and nihilistic. Way more people than you think. And part of that is because no one's ever really encouraged them. And so the book is, in part, the matter of encouragement. It's like lay a disciplinary structure on yourself. Get the chaos in check, and then you can move towards a state that's freer, because it's discipline first. Look, if you're going to become a concert pianist, there's going to be several thousand dollar of extraordinary discipline practice, that's the imposition of order on your potential, let's say, but what comes out of that is a grander freedom. And so virtually every freedom that you have in life that's true freedom, is purchased at the price of discipline. And so because I think that it's nihilism and hopelessness that constitute the major existential threat, especially to young people at the moment, then I was concentrating on the necessity of discipline and order.

And the issue with regards to the metaphysical or symbolic representation of chaos as feminine, well that's a very complex problem. The first thing you have to understand is that there's no apriority supposition that order is preferable to chaos in any fundamental sense. There both constituent elements of reality. You can't say one is bad and the other's good. You can say that they can become unbalanced, and that's definitely not good. Too much chaos is not good. Obviously. Too much order is not good. Equally obviously. Those are the two extremes that you have to negotiate between. And I'm not making a casual claim with regards to the idea that reality is an amalgam of chaos and order. I don't think there is any more accurate way of describing the nature of reality.

That's the most fundamental, maybe not the most fundamental truth, but it's certainly ... There's two fundamental truths. Reality is composed of chaos and order. And your role is to mediate between them successfully. That's metaphysical and symbolic truth, but it's more than that, but it's more than that because that's actually how your mind and your brain is organized. Not only conceptually, but emotionally, motivationally, and physiologically. I don't really understand how that can be, because it isn't obvious to me how the most fundamental elements of reality can be chaos and order, but the evidence that that is the case is overwhelming.

I can give you a quick example, which is quite interesting. You have two hemispheres. There is a reason for that. The fundamental reason for that is that one of them is adapted for things you don't understand, that's roughly speaking the right hemisphere, and the other is adapted for things that you do understand, that's the left hemisphere. And so that's a chaos order dichotomy, and the fact that you're adapted to that, that the very structure of your brain reflects that bifurcation indicates, as far as I can tell, beyond a shadow of a doubt, because it's also characteristic of nonhuman animals, many of them that differentiation is fundamentally true in some sense.

Now you might ask, "Well, why is that conceptualized as masculine versus feminine, because it's not male versus female." By the way, those are not the same thing because one's conceptual. That's extraordinarily complicated. I think the reason is is that we're social cognitive primates, and that our fundamental cognitive categories, a priority cognitive categories, are masculine, feminine, and child. It's something like that. That's the fundamental structure of reality, because we're social creatures and we view reality as something that's essentially social in it's nature. And then when we started to conceptualize reality outside the social world, which wasn't very long ago by the way, and which is something that animals virtually don't do at all, we use those apriority social categories as filters which we interpreted the external world. And we're sort of stuck with that in some deep sense.

And you might say, "Well, why do we have to be stuck with that?" It's like, "Well, because some things are very difficult to change." Like if you go watch a story and the characters in this story slot themselves into those archetypal categories, then you'll understand the story. And if they don't, you won't, because your understanding is predicated on application of the archetypal a priorities to the story. You wouldn't understand it otherwise. You can't get under that. There's no under that. Not to remain human. And I can give you a quick example. I like to use Disney movies for a variety of reasons, mostly because everybody knows them. The evil queen in Sleeping Beauty is not an accidental character. She's the way she is because we understand her, and the reason we understand her is because we see the world through the categories that I just laid out. And you can say, "Well,-

Bari Weiss:

But are you saying she has to be a queen and not a king?

Jordan Peterson: No, if she was an evil King, she'd be different. She'd be like Scar in the Lion King. He's just as evil, man, but not the same character, right?

Bari Weiss: Yeah. I guess I'm struck that it seems like a lot of your intellectual project is reasserting difference in an age where we were told that everything's the same.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah, but that's stupid.

Bari Weiss: And that it's almost indecent to say ... Okay.

Jordan Peterson: Well, look, look. I'm sorry to be so blunt, but look the problem with some of this, some of its willful blindness, but some of it's just ignorance. Let me just lay out a couple of things. For example, I've been taken to task, along with James Demur who had been highly influenced by my videos and my classes before he did what he did at Google. You know I've studied personality differences between men and women for 25 years and written papers on the topic. It's actually an area of expertise of mine, and substantial expertise too. And not pseudoscience expertise. Thank you very much. I'm not a pseudoscientist. My publication record puts me in the top 0.5% of psychologists. I'm not a pseudoscientist by any stretch of the imagination. And I have ten thousand citations. And that's not a million, but it's a lot. And a hundred published papers.

Let me lay out one of the personality differences between men and women because it's worth understanding. And you might say, "Well, there can't be personality differences between men and women because it's antifeminist." It's like no it's not. We might have to actually understand that there are differences between men and women, so that we can let men and women make the choices they're going to make without subjecting them to undo manipulation. One of the reliable differences between men and women cross culturally is that men are more aggressive than women. Now, what's the evidence for that? Here's one piece of evidence. They are 10 times men in prison. What's that? A sociocultural construct. It's like no. It's not a sociocultural construct. Okay? Here's another piece of data. Women try to commit suicide more than men by a lot, and that's because women are more prone to depression and anxiety than men are, and there's a reason for that. And that's cross culturally true as well. They're more likely to try to commit suicide. But men are way more likely to actually commit suicide. Why? Because they're more aggressive, so they use lethal means.

Okay, so now the question is how much more aggressive are men than women? And the answer is not very much. So the claim that men and women are more the same than different is actually true, but this is where you have to know something about statistics to actually understand the way the world works, instead of just applying your apriority ideological presupposition to things that are too complex to fit in that rubric. If you drew two people out of a crowd, one man and one woman, and you had to lay a bet on who was more aggressive, and you bet on the woman, you'd win 40% of the time. So that's quite a lot. It's

not 50% of the time, which would be no differences whatsoever, but it's quite a lot. There are lots of women who are more aggressive than lots of men. The curves overlap a lot. There's way more similarity than difference. And this is along the dimension where there's the most difference by the way. Right?

But here's the problem. You can take small differences at the average of a distribution. The distributions move off to the side. Then all actions at the tail. So, here's the situation. You don't care about how aggressive the average person is. It's not that relevant. What you care about is who is the most aggressive person out of a hundred. Take 100 people, and you take the most aggressive person, because that's the person you better watch out for. And what's the gender? Men. Because if you go three standard deviations out from the mean on two curves that overlap, but are slightly disjointed. Then you derive an overwhelming preponderance of the over represented group. And that's why men are about 10 times more likely to be in prison. It has nothing to do with socialization.

And then there are other differences too. It turns out the differences in aggression and agreeableness also predict differences in interest. And so it turns out that men are more interested on average in things than women are, and women are more interested in people on average. And that's actually the biggest difference that's been measured between men and women. It's nothing to do with ability. It has to do with interest. And the way that manifests itself is that women are more likely to disciplines that are characterized by the care of others, and you can tell that by the way occupations are segregating. All you have to do is look at the data for 15 minutes. Women overwhelmingly dominate healthcare. And that's accelerating, by the way. And men dominate engineering, let's say. And so you say, "That's sociocultural." It's like, "No, it's not." And here's the proof.

Now what you do is you want to test this hypothesis, right? And the other thing you want to understand is that left leaning psychologists generated this data. And you think, "How do you know that?" That's easy. There are no right leaning psychologists.

Bari Weiss: Except for you.

Jordan Peterson: Well, that's what people say, you know. And so-

Bari Weiss: I'm on stage with the only one.

Jordan Peterson: And that's been well documented. And so people have published this data despite their ideological proclivities, and despite the fact that this is not what they expected to find or what they wanted to find. What you do now is you stack countries by egalitarian they social policies are. Right? From the least egalitarian to the most. And you say, "Well, the Scandinavian countries are the most egalitarian." And by the way if we don't agree on that, then there's no

sense having this discussion, because we don't agree on what egalitarian means. If you don't think that what the Scandinavians have done as being a move in the direction of egalitarianism, then I have no idea what you mean by egalitarianism. Now you could say they haven't done it perfectly. It's like, "Yeah, yeah. That's true." But it's not relevant to this argument.

What you do is you stack countries by how egalitarian their social policies are, and then you look at occupational and personality differences between men and women as a function of the country. And what you find is as the country becomes more egalitarian, the differences between men and women increase. They don't decrease. And what that means is that the radical social constructionists are wrong. And it's not a few studies with a couple of people done with some half witted psychologist in some tiny little university. It's population level studies that have been published in major journals that have been cited by thousands of people. It's no pseudoscience. It's not questioned by mainstream psychometrician and personality theorists. We figured this out back in like 1995. Everyone thought it was settled. And so what's the big problem? Well, who know what the big problem is. The outcome is not exactly the same between the genders. It's like, well, who says it has to be. And more importantly, and this is something to ask yourself constantly, just who the hell's going to enforce that? And just exactly how are they going to enforce that? And believe me, it's not going to be in some manner that you like, because there are differences between men and women. And if you leave them alone, those differences manifest themselves in different occupational choices.

That's the other finding. This is a newer one. As the societies become more egalitarian, the occupational choices between men and women maximize. And what that means is that fewer and fewer women go into the STEM fields. Now, no one wanted that. No one predicted it. No one was hoping for it. It actually flew in the face of, I would say, the most established psychological theories, because my presuppositions certainly was 20 years ago that what would have happened as we made societies more egalitarian would be that men and woman would converge. That's not what happened. The biological differences maximized as we eliminated the sociocultural differences. And so maybe you don't like that. That's fine with me. I didn't say I liked it. But whether or not I like a piece of data has very little bearing on whether or not I'm libel to accept it. Now I'm trying to look at the damn scientific literature and to draw the conclusions that are necessitated by the data. And then you can say the whole thing is suspect because it's the construction of the patriarchal tyranny-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [01:02:04]

Jordan Peterson: It's the construction of the patriarchal tyrants who generated the Eurocentric scientific viewpoint. It's like you want to have that conversation then go to an activist discipline and have it, because it's not the sort of conversation that anyone sensible would engage in.

Bari Weiss: I'd love to open up the room to questions. Please Sensible questions and please keep them short.

Jordan Peterson: Or non-sensible.

Bari Weiss: But genuine questions. Someone with a microphone will find you if you raise your hand. Yes.

Prera: Yeah, hi, good evening. My name is [Prera 01:02:42]. I wanted to understand a little bit of your view more on the fact that, not fact, but at least observation, that over generations and generations, at least what I've heard and seen from my family, I can take up that women being told about their position in the home and men being told that position to work and be a little more aggressive, the social conditioning. So how does that play a role? Because I didn't hear that being a dimension of reaching these conclusions.

Jordan Peterson: Well, I've never claimed that the differences between men and women are 100% biologically determined. They're biologically influenced. The radical constructionists make the opposite claim. There are no biological differences between men and women. It's like, well, first of all, that's so preposterous. That barely even requires an answer, but you might specify it a bit and say, no, there are no biological differences that manifest themselves psychologically. That's not quite as preposterous, but it's also incorrect. It's obviously the case that all sorts of things about sex roles and gender roles, let's say, are conditioned by sociocultural mechanisms because human beings are very, very plastic. And so the manner in which those biological differences manifest themselves in a culture is radically influenced by the nature of the culture. But that doesn't mean that the biological influences don't exist.

Bari Weiss: But are you saying should we be countering that sort of traditional cultural mores?

Prera: What I still didn't understand is at one point you were saying it's not necessarily biological but ... At one point you were saying that it's not necessarily biological or inherent, if to paraphrase it.

Jordan Peterson: Well, some of it is.

Prera: Yeah. But it's very unclear in the way, at least maybe one out is very short and maybe needs a larger discussion. It seems that it's easy to deduce that these are inherent differences which exists and social conditioning wasn't taken as a parameter to [crosstalk 01:04:57]

Jordan Peterson: That's controlled for by the comparison between societies that have different levels of egalitarianism built into their social structure. That's all taken care of in the analysis. If the biological differences manifest themselves maximally where the sociocultural influences to equalize gender are maximal then obviously the

biological differences are powerful and profound. It's conclusive. So it's taken into account in the data analysis. So that's why you stack up the countries by the egalitarian nature of their social policies is to control for the socio cultural influence. You got to admit, just think it through for a minute. It isn't even that what you would have expected theoretically is that the societies that are the least egalitarian would have the biggest differences between men and women and that as the societies has got more and more egalitarian, those differences would get smaller and maybe disappear even, but that isn't what happened. It's exactly the opposite is what happened.

They maximized in the most egalitarian societies. Therefore, the social constructionist position, the radical social constructionist position, is wrong. It's wrong. It's been refuted, which is partly why the radical social constructionists have taken the legislative route to impose their view point. They lost the scientific war, but then we can just attack science. It's like, well, it's science itself that's suspect. It's like, well, then quit using your iPhones.

Bari Weiss: Questions.

Jordan Peterson: If you're going to have your convictions, man, lay them out in your life. If you think the scientific process is suspect and tyrannical and oppressive and all that, then quit using the products that it produces. You don't get to have your cake and eat it too.

Bari Weiss: Let's go to this young woman right here. Yeah. And then we'll go to you.

Julia: Hi, my name's Julia and I recently read in the New York Times an article about your comments on forced monogamy. What are your comments on how that was perceived by the public and specifically the left?

Bari Weiss: Great question.

Jordan Peterson: Well.

Bari Weiss: I think it was an enforced monogamy, though.

Jordan Peterson: Enforced monogamy, yeah. Yeah, enforced monogamy. First of all, that's a technical term, by the way, that's been used in the anthropological literature for 100 years and the journalist, who was not stupid, knew that perfectly well and reported the story the way she reported it despite that. But what's even more surreal than that about that story is that if you're going to try to undermine someone's credibility and do it effectively, you should attribute them to an extreme view that some person somewhere actually holds. Okay? And so the view that was attributed to me was something like I want to-

Bari Weiss: The road to Handmaid's Tale.

Jordan Peterson: Yes. I want to find useless men and distribute women to them at the point of a gun so that they don't become violent. It's like no one has ever believed that ever anywhere. And certainly including me.

Bari Weiss: Except Margaret Atwood.

Jordan Peterson: Well, right. That's right, she wrote a book about that. It's just absolutely preposterous and it's preposterous in a bunch of ways because she interviewed me for two days and we talked about that for about two minutes. It was a peripheral conversation. It's an anthropological truism generated primarily by scholars on the left, just so everyone's clear about it, that societies that use monogamy as a social norm, which by the way is virtually every human society that's ever existed, do that in an attempt to control the aggression that goes along with polygamy. It's like, oh my God, how contentious can you get? It's like, well, how many of you are in monogamous relationships? Well, the majority. How has that enforced?

Bari Weiss: I think this is a very polyamorous room if I have a look around.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah. It was desperate. That's what it looked like to me. But the problem is it was also desperate and amateurish. It's like she could have done a much better job with a much less extreme characterization. It's like, oh yes, I want to take women at the point of a gun and distribute them to useless men. It's so stupid. Partly because like if she would have been reasonable, and she knew this too, one of the things I've told men specifically over and over and over and over is if you're being rejected by all the women that you approach, it's not the women. Right?

Because you know these characters who, like the guy that mowed down those people in Toronto, he ends up blaming women and he's blaming more than women in some sense. He's blaming the structure of being for producing women that reject him. And so that's part of what makes them violent. It's like, well, what the hell's wrong with him? You know, he's got it completely backwards. If everyone you talk to is boring, it's not them. Right? And so if you're rejected by the opposite sex, assuming that you're heterosexual, then you're wrong. They're not wrong and you've got some work to do, man, you got some difficult work to do. And there isn't anything that I've been telling, let's say, young men that's clearer than that. It's actually something I've been criticized by people on the left because they think I don't take structural inequality for example and so forth into account sufficiently.

What I've been telling people is take the responsibility for your failure onto yourself and that certainly applies to, well, especially when you're trying to formulate a relationship and you're getting rejected left, right, and center. It's like that's a hint that you have some work to do. Now it also might be a hint that you're just young and useless and why the hell would anybody ... Absolutely. Why the hell would anybody have anything to do with you because you don't have

anything to offer? But that's rectifiable and partly even maturity rectifies that. So not only was that ... What would you call it? Accusation. Surreal and absurd made by a journalist who knew perfectly well what I was suggesting and chose to misrepresent it anyways. It's actually the opposite that the conclusion that people derive from that is exactly the opposite of what I've been suggesting in particular to young men. So it's absolutely preposterous.

Bari Weiss: Yes. Where the microphone is. Yes.

John: Professor Peterson.

Bari Weiss: Oh.

John: Hi Berry.

Bari Weiss: Hi.

John: It's is good to see you up there.

Bari Weiss: You too.

John: I teach students. I teach trans students. And I'm asked often to call people singularly they. It started probably about four years ago. It struck me as very odd. I'm 52. And some of them you can tell that it's coming from a very deep place and that's how they feel and they deeply need to be called they. Some of them my horse sense says that they're kind of enjoying giving me a certain shock and that there's a certain theatrical aspect. It's my horse sense that there's a certain [foreign language 01:12:27] aspect to it. I kind of feel it and I'm probably right, but I can't know. I'm a linguist. I'm a person and my general feeling has been whatever they ask, just go with it and let's change our usage of the pronouns because we have a lot to do.

Now. What you said was interesting. You said that the way that you make the difference in deciding these cases is based on the fact that you have psychological training and you can tell. What I want to know is for my own elucidation and also because I think many of us wondered, but then it kind of went by, how do you know? Now I want to specify. I'd rather you didn't recount the whole episode of how ridiculously you were treated amidst that whole controversy.

Bari Weiss: Sure.

John: Three quarters of the room knows. I sympathize with you. I thought it was ridiculous. I want to know specifically because I'm a linguist. You have psychological training. How would you know?

Jordan Peterson: Well, first-

John: If you hear ... I'm almost done.

Jordan Peterson: Oh yeah. No problem.

John: If you hear a tiny bit of skepticism in my voice, you're correct. However, I am open to being convinced. Based on your training, which is immense, how would you know which students to discount as opposed to which ones to go along with?

Jordan Peterson: Okay. Well, of all I wouldn't know. Right? Which is partly why your skepticism is justified. But I have to be responsible for what I say based on my willingness to take responsibility for my judgment. So I would be willing to do that despite the fact that I might be wrong. But having said that, in any reasonable situation, I would err on the side of addressing the person in the manner that they requested to be addressed. But that's not the issue for me. The issue is now I'm compelled by law to do so. It's like no, not doing it. Not now because it's compelled by law. So that's the end of the game as far as I'm concerned. Because there is no excuse for compelling it by law.

That's my position and I think there's all sorts of reasons for that. I don't think it was an isolated legislative move. I think it's part and parcel of a whole sequence of legislative moves that have been made and that continued to be made in Canada. I think it's an attempt by a certain radical ideological ... What would you say? A certain radical ideology to gain the linguistic upper hand, which I think is a terrible thing to do, to allow. So I had lots of reasons for rejecting the legislation, but it had nothing to do with [crosstalk 01:15:06]

John: ... about how your psychological training would make the difference. That's very interesting. We're talking about expertise here and my ears pricked up when you talked about how there is a way of thinking that would allow us to decide. I know me of my students-

Jordan Peterson: There's a way of thinking that would allow me to decide for me.

John: No, us to decide for us. Surely you have a larger mission than just what's going on in your own head and I mean that.

Jordan Peterson: No, I had a perfectly straightforward mission, which was there was no damn way I was going to say those words when I was compelled to by law. That was my mission.

John: You weren't trying to model for the rest of us a way of thinking. It was really only about you?

Jordan Peterson: No, well, it was about me and the law. I thought the law makers had gone too far. They'd stepped out of their appropriate territory into the domain of linguistic freedom. As far as I was concerned, I was going to put up with that.

And so if people were happy about that and wanted to follow the example that was fine with them, but for me it was something ... And that was the statement. I'm not doing this. And then people can draw their own conclusions from that. Maybe they want to do it. I mean, and I've spoken with no shortage of trans people and my proclivity has been without exception so far to address them in the manner that seems most socially appropriate under the circumstances. Now you asked a specific question which was, do I have special expertise that I might share with with other people?

John: Because you're doing Martin Luther and I think that these issues are a little subtler than those. [crosstalk 01:16:39]

Jordan Peterson: What makes you think that you're doing the kids that are grandstanding any favors by going along with their manipulation?

John: Because I can't decide which ones those are. I just have my gut instincts and that's not good enough.

Jordan Peterson: Look, fair enough, but you have a type one and type two error problem. So one error is that you don't call students what they deserve to be called. That's one error. And the other error is that you call students what they want to be called even though they don't deserve it. And so what you're trying to do optimally is to minimize both those errors and to do that you have to take the middle route. Now what you've decided to do, and I'm not criticizing it, is you've decided to allow for the possibility 100% of one of those errors because you think it's a less significant error and you know you might be right. But it's not like you're acting in an era of free manner. You've just decided to minimize one form of error at the expense of the other. Because I would say you're allowing ... What would you call it? Attention seeking and somewhat narcissistic undergraduates to gain the upper hand over you in your class.

Bari Weiss: Is it?

Jordan Peterson: Believe me, it's not a criticism. It's not a criticism. I understand why you're doing it.

Bari Weiss: Isn't John just erring on the side of generosity and compassion?

John: I have one more thing to say.

Jordan Peterson: Sure.

John: Because I'm not going to take up any more space.

Jordan Peterson: Okay.

John: Are you saying that psychological theory has nothing to teach us about this? Because you're talking around my question. You're gorgeously articulate. You're smarter than me. Does psychology have anything to teach us or not? Yes or no?

Jordan Peterson: I don't think-

John: On this question.

Jordan Peterson: I don't think that it has anything to teach ... I don't think it has anything to offer that I could teach you without ... Let me think.

John: So it's just too complicated?

Jordan Peterson: No, no, it's not. No, no, it's not that. Well, it is that in part because it's not easy to articulate out the principles, the unerring principles by which he would make such a categorical judgment. Right? Because those are very situation specific problems. It's part of the problem of how to make a generic moral truth apply to a very individualistic situation. The problem in the sorts of situations that you're describing is generally the devil's in the details, right? If you have all these students, the ones that you just laid out, they vary in their attitude towards their self-professed gender from the ones who are grandstanding to some degree, let's say, to the ones that are very serious. You have to make a judgment in the moment that is dependent on the variables that present themselves in a very complex way in that situation.

I understand why you took the pathway that you took and it's perfectly reasonable to do so. My point was that you don't minimize all the errors by doing so. It's fine. It's still a fine way of approaching. My point was that because of my psychological acumen, I would say, that the experience that I've derived is that I would be comfortable in making the judgment and taking the consequential risk. I'm not saying I'd be correct. That's not the same thing at all. I'm willing to suffer the consequences of my error. That's not the same thing as being right. And so if I feel that a student is manipulating me, then I'm not going to go along with it. Now, I might be wrong about that and actually hurt someone who's genuinely asking for something that they need. But I'm also ... What would you say? Sensitive to the error of allowing manipulation to go unchecked. Aha, you're back.

Bari Weiss: No. John.

John: This is the last thing I'm going to say.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: Okay.

Bari Weiss: And then there can be a two hour podcast about this on your wonderful podcast just everyone should listen to.

John: Everything you're saying is very well put, but it's awfully slippery and I know you can do better. It; too slippery for me.

Bari Weiss: Invite him on. Okay. Hands. Here in the orange and pink scarf.

Speaker 1: Thank you, Barry. And thank you both for this really interesting conversation, which is not like most of the conversations we've had here at the Ideas Festival.

Bari Weiss: This is my first one, so I have no idea.

Speaker 1: So, Dr. Peterson, there are a million questions that I'd like to ask you. I'm only going to ask one. Obviously, I'm a psychologist, I'm a social psychologist with a clinical background. The thing that I think I'd like to most hear about right now at this moment is the very noisy, small percentage of people who oppose you. Have you thought about something they might be right about that they might actually have a point about that you hadn't thought of, but you've started to think they might actually have a point.

Bari Weiss: Great question.

Jordan Peterson: I don't know if I've started to think about the point that they have that I didn't think about before. I mean, people have been characterizing me as right wing. It's like I'm not right wing. So the characterization isn't very helpful. And one of the things I do all the time in my public lectures is make a case for the utility of the left. The case can be made quite rapidly. If you're going to pursue things of value in a social environment, you're going to produce a hierarchy. It's unavoidable because some people are better at whatever it is that you value. And so when that lays itself out socially it will produce a hierarchy. The hierarchy has a necessity if you're going to pursue the things of value, but it has a risk. The risk is that will ossify and become corrupt. That's risk number one and risk number two is that when you produce the hierarchy, you're going to dispossess a number of people because there'll be lots of people in the hierarchy who aren't good at it, and they'll be dispossessed. So you need a political voice for them. That's the left.

So I make that case over and over. Now what the right does this say, "Yeah, but we still need the hierarchy."

It's like, "Yes, you still need the hierarchy."

The reason we need the political dialogue is because need the hierarchy and we can't let it get out of control. The way to balance those two competing necessities isn't by only having the hierarchy or dissolving the hierarchy. You have to live with the tension because the situation keeps shifting. So the way

you live with the tension is by talking. You say, well, here's the current state that the hierarchy needs to be tweaked this much because it's getting to tyrannical and it's dispossessing too many people. So we need to tweak it so that it's not as corrupt and so that it's a little bit more open. and we have to talk about that all the time and that's what the right and left ... It's not the only thing they do because they also talk about the necessity of borders. That's the other fundamental thing that they do.

The dialogue has to continue so that we can have the hierarchies and utilize them as tools without allowing them to descend into tyranny. Okay, so I made a case. I made a case on the web. I did a talk at the University of British Columbia, a left wing case for free speech, as if that's so difficult to make. I mean that's the sort of case that was made until like 2014 or something like that. So the left leaning types have all sorts of things that are correct to say. Now the problem is, one of the problems of the left, and this is another thing that I talk about all the time in my public lectures by the way, is we have a problem. We know how to put a box around the extremists on the right. Basically we say, "Oh, you're making claims of ethnic or racial superiority. You're not part of the conversation anymore."

What do we do on the left? Nothing. That's not good. Because there's an issue. Can the left go too far? Yes. When? Oh, we don't know. Oh, that's not a very good answer. Now you could say, well then it's up to the moderate leftists to figure that out so they can dissociate themselves from the radicals and it is up to them. But that's actually not a very good answer either because it's all of our problem. It's not centrists don't know how to reliably identify the too radical left. Right wingers don't know how and it's partly because I think it's actually conceptually more complex. Like with the radical right, you can kind of lay it down to one dimension. Oh, racial superiority. Nope. Sorry. You're out of the conversation.

Bari Weiss: But that's Milo who you mentioned before.

Jordan Peterson: Well, I didn't say I was a fan of Milo.

Bari Weiss: No, but you called him a prankster.

Jordan Peterson: Well, he is a prankster mostly.

Bari Weiss: Yeah, but he's also a racist.

Jordan Peterson: Well, possibly. Yeah. I haven't followed Milo that carefully.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: It's possible that he is. I mean, it's hard to tell what Milo is exactly. He's a very complicated and contradictory person destined to implode, which is exactly

what happened. Well, there's just no way you can be that contradictory a person and manage it. It's just not possible. He was just too many things happening at the same time for anyone to ever manage. But on the left, I don't know what it is. I think the left becomes toxic. One of the things that makes the left unacceptable is demands for equality of outcome. It's like, nope, you crossed the line, man. That's not an acceptable demand and that's increasingly a moderate leftist demand as well. Now, but I don't know. It might be more complex. It might be that there's four things that you have to demand on the left that all of a sudden makes what you're doing unacceptable. And we don't know what those four things are.

And so I actually think it's a conceptual problem as well as an ethical problem. We don't know how to bind the necessary left so that the radicals don't dominate counter productively. And if you don't think that the radical leftists can dominate counter productively, then, well, heaven help you.

Bari Weiss: That I agree with. But the idea that it's so clear on the right is not clear to me. I mean look at the Trump administration.

Jordan Peterson: Oh, I don't think that it's necessarily applied very clearly, but at least conceptually it's more-

Bari Weiss: But we can point it out.

Jordan Peterson: Well, we can point it out better.

Bari Weiss: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jordan Peterson: I mean-

Bari Weiss: That's because of World War II?

Jordan Peterson: Yes. Yeah. That helped quite a lot actually.

Bari Weiss: Okay.

Jordan Peterson: Yeah. Yeah. But the thing is, is that the communist catastrophes don't seem to have made it any clearer on the left.

Bari Weiss: Yes

Jordan Peterson: And now that's another thing that the universities have done that's unacceptable, by the way. The intellectual class, I would say, is that it's never come to terms properly with the fact that the intellectual class as a whole was supportive of the communist experiment. And it was an absolutely catastrophic failure on every what measure of analysis. People say, "Well, that wasn't real communism." It's like you really shouldn't ever say that because what it means

is ... This is what it means. It's the most arrogant statement that a person can make. It means that had I been in the position of Stalin with my proper conceptualization of the Marxist utopia, I would have ushered in the utopia. That's what it means. And it's like, no, first of all, if you actually were that good spirited and you're not, by the way, if you were, you would have been eliminated so fast after the revolution occurred, that it would've killed you because that's what happened. It's what happened. Like all the well meaning people after the Russian revolution, the small minority of people that were genuinely well meaning, they were dead within two or three years. That wasn't real communism.

Bari Weiss: I think I see real zero as in zero questions, zero time, zero something. One more question. Really? Okay.

Speaker 2: [inaudible 01:28:26]

Bari Weiss: I know several people do. Can we take a few and he'll answer them shortly? Like maybe two more? Okay, let's go here and the front row right here. Yes. But make it very, very short.

Speaker 3: Very short. Thank you for coming. I'm honored. Very important. Great mentor. Great help to me. And a lot of people that I've been sharing your work with. I have two books here and I would like you to sign them for me.

Bari Weiss: Okay. You can do that. Yes. People do that after, I'm sure. Yes.

Speaker 4: Professor Peterson, this is akin to the question that the young woman over there asked, but if you could get in a self reflective mode over the course of your life and career to date, what could you say honestly to us about where you felt you've been most wrong and what provoked that self assessment?

Jordan Peterson: I'm not how I've been wronged.

Bari Weiss: How you've been wrong.

Jordan Peterson: Wrong?

Bari Weiss: Incorrect.

Speaker 4: Like a wrong in your thinking where you-

Jordan Peterson: I was wrong about the big five personality theory for about five years. I know that's not very interesting to any of you. I didn't like it at all. It was brute force, statistically derived. It wasn't theoretically interesting. I didn't like it at all, but I was wrong about that because the science was well done. What else have I been wrong about? Well, you asked for profound examples of being wrong and

in my field that's actually a profound example because that's one of the major theories in the field. You were thinking about more interesting examples.

What have I changed radically? Oh, well, you know, when I was a kid I was an avid socialist. I was wrong about that. But more specifically, I was wrong about that because I thought that there were questions that I want answered that that doctrine could answer. And it wasn't that it was socialism that didn't make the answers emerge. It was that it was the wrong level of analysis. So that was a major source of error. It was sort of the source of error that the journalists who were going after me are making, they think everything's political. It's like, no, it's not. There's lots of levels of analysis and the political is one. And I learned eventually that the political wasn't the right level of analysis for the questions that I was interested in addressing and that was a major error. It took me years to sort that out into and to figure out what the consequence was.

I was wrong about the significance of religious ideas because when I was a kid, 13 or so, when I was smart enough at that point to see the contradiction between an evolutionary account of the origin of human beings and say a scriptural account. And so I just dispensed with that in the sort of new atheist move and I threw the baby out with the bathwater and I was really wrong about that. Like profoundly wrong about that. And I'm sure I'm wrong about a bunch of other things, but I'll figure out what some of those are as we go ahead. So that's three things. Those are big things. If I thought more I could come up with other examples, but those are pretty big things that I was wrong about.

Bari Weiss: Thank you all so much. Clearly an hour and a half is not enough with you, but thank you so much for your time.

Jordan Peterson: Thank you very much. Thank you.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [01:32:02]