

The Jordan Peterson Phenomenon

by David Solway



When we had lunch together one afternoon a few months back, Canadian psychologist and university professor Jordan Peterson, who has risen to meteoric prominence for his courageous stand against political correctness and legally compelled speech, looked distressingly frail and was on a restricted diet prescribed by his physician. The ordeal the press and the University of Toronto's administration, which had threatened to discipline him for his refusal to accede to legislation forcing the use of invented pronouns, had obviously taken its toll. (Note: Peterson was willing to address individuals by their chosen pronouns, but was not willing to be forced to do so by law.)

Our conversation ranged over the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, C.G. Jung and Fyodor Dostoevsky, Peterson's chief secular resources, as well as the Book of Genesis, the Prophetic

literature and the Gospel of John, Peterson's biblical lynchpins. His meditations on these texts have obviously struck a chord with his audience. From Nietzsche's complex web of ideas, he focuses on the notion of critical strength to combat cultural weakness and the primacy of the individual over the group. From Jung comes the theory of the hero archetype, the feral "shadow" component of the psyche which must be both acknowledged and mastered, and the "animus dominated" feminist on a quest for societal control. He elaborates on the political wisdom of Dostoevsky's novels *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, and expands on a favorite quote from *Notes from Underground*, "You can say anything about world history. ... Except one thing. ... It cannot be said that world history is reasonable."

From the biblical wellspring he develops the idea of creative vitality transforming darkness into light, reflects on the Prophetic summons to integrity, righteousness and the Kingdom of God – for Peterson the ground of the higher good and the divinity of the soul – and stresses the concept of the Logos, the principle that imposes order on chaos and seeks to make the unreasonable rational, which he identifies with the spirit of masculinity.

Peterson is clearly filling a gaping spiritual vacuum experienced by a vast community, primarily young men, who have been deprived of agency, self-confidence and life-meaning. And he is doing so by representing the insights of his sources to readers and viewers unfamiliar with these magisterial texts and cultural giants – a privation owing in large measure to poor upbringing and an anorexic education. Pajama Boys living in their parents' basement drinking hot chocolate rather than the Castalian water of knowledge, and men young and old who have been infected and oppressed by the feminist preaching of toxic masculinity, are in desperate need of moral revitalization and intellectual supervision.

The Peterson phenomenon, then, testifies to the deep sense of spiritual emptiness in our culture. Confronting the abyss, he argues that nobility is possible despite the recognition that life inescapably involves suffering, evil and death, and contends that male vigor, fortitude and resilience are essential to cultural survival. In a culture obsessed with group rights, Peterson points out that absent its necessary counterpart, individual responsibility, social collapse is inevitable.

Peterson's message is not new to anyone who has read and pondered his sources; yet it is new in the sense that he has performed an act of synthesis for a largely illiterate, politically indoctrinated and under-educated generation. As John Dale Dunn writes in *American Thinker*, Peterson's "great accomplishment is teaching, counseling, and coaching people to urge them to live the good life, the virtuous life. ... The only way he might be ambushed is [by being targeted] by the destroyers of the left with their name calling and politics of personal destruction," deploying tactics straight out of Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*.

And indeed, the leftist/feminist vendetta is following the script. The now famous interview between Peterson and the BBC 4's Cathy Newman, a feminist attack dog, was indeed fascinating, a true gentleman and reflective thinker on one side, on the other a vehement harridan and raving ideologue. Indeed, it was not so much an interview as a planned assault, which did not go as intended. Newman came off as a hectoring bully who insisted on re-interpreting each of Peterson's answers in order to place him in a bad light. She quite literally did not know what she was talking about, was no match for Peterson's wit, intelligence and erudition, and could scarcely follow the intricacies of his reasoning. The attack failed miserably. The BBC then played the victim card, placing Newman under protection against bruited threats to her safety in order to portray Peterson as the leader of a

dangerous right-wing cult threatening the civil order. One can plainly see how the media hegemon operates, by applying Alinsky's Rule 12: "Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it," and then feigning injury if the strategy fails.

The campaign against Peterson's presence and his message is now in full swing in his own country. Canada's main public affairs magazine *Maclean's* has featured an article (Nov. 17, 2017) titled "Is Jordan Peterson the stupid man's smart person?" – shades of Hillary's deplorables – written by a certain Tabatha Southey. It is a sophomoric rant dripping with smug disingenuousness and fey pro-Marxist rhetoric, accusing Peterson of monetizing his unease and of being a belle of the alt-right. She refers to Peterson as, variously, Jordan Pea-Headerson, Jordan Eggman, Dr. Pettyson, J-man and J. Pete the Beet, of whom "most of what he says is, after fifteen seconds' consideration, completely inane."

But Southey declines to demonstrate that she has given any of his statements even fifteen seconds' consideration. Considering pontifical vulgarities to constitute an argument, "What he's telling you," she proclaims derisively, "is that certain people – most of them women and minorities – are trying to destroy not only our freedom to spite nonbinary university students for kicks, but all of Western civilization and the idea of objective truth itself." But in what sense is gender fluidity an "objective truth"? Moreover, the fact is that influential postmodern leaders such as Jean-Francois Lyotard,

Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and Jean Baudrillard are on record denying that objective or universal truth exists: rather, all is interpretation or a function of communal agreement. Peterson is bang-on.

The problem with Southey is by no means unique. It is shared

by Peterson detractors in general and even by the editorial board of what presumes to be a serious magazine, namely: an utter lack of taste, the inability to discriminate between superficial one-upmanship and scrupulous analysis, and intellectual vacuousness of the first magnitude.

Similarly, Canada's boutique left-wing journal *The Walrus* ran a defamatory article by University of Toronto professor Ira Wells, under the title "The Professor of Piffle" (Nov. 27, 2017). The article is a veritable trove of gross incivilities, lies, misrepresentations, slanders, and contradictions, coated in a thick mantle of sanctimoniousness – the hallmark of the neo-Marxist brand of intellectual misbehavior.

We are informed that Peterson – here we go again – is "the intellectual guru of the alt-right" who libels postmodern thinkers for money, as if Mr. Wells wrote his piece libelling Peterson for free. (*The Walrus* pays between \$1500-\$2000 for longer reviews.) We are given, inter alia, some problematic statements about the nature of IQ, postmodern philosophers, artistic values, etc.

As usual, calumnies are offered in place of counter-argument. Referring to Peterson's online conversation with Camille Paglia, Wells writes that "he lamented that men can't exert control over 'crazy women' by physically beating them." Anyone who has watched the interview will see that Wells has twisted Peterson's words, slandering him with an outright decontextualization and intentional misinterpretation. Peterson was making a perfectly legitimate observation that there is a culturally sanctioned inequality between men and women favoring the latter. A woman may strike a man with impunity but a man must not strike a woman if he wishes to avoid social censure and punitive legal action. Peterson is not "lamenting" anything. He is merely stating the plain truth that "men can't control 'crazy women,'" and Paglia, herself a leftwing sympathizer and longtime feminist, chuckled and

nodded in evident agreement. Wells then goes on to bash Peterson for “echo[ing] Donald Trump on fake news,” unaware that he himself has just faked the news. Most of these anti-Peterson types are patently guilty of precisely the misdemeanors they accuse Peterson of.

Wells mops up the remnants of his carnage by falsifying the position of Lindsay Shepherd, the Wilfrid Laurier University TA who was interrogated by her superiors for bringing to class a five minute clip of Peterson on TV-Ontario's *The Point*. Wells claims she “suggested we challenge [Peterson's] assumptions, correct his willful misinterpretation of the humanities, and reveal the pseudo-scientific basis of his attitudes.” Not so. Shepherd says that she believes in open dialogue across the political spectrum and condemns the “authoritarian leftists [who] are social justice warriors.” Her discussion with Peterson on Louder with Crowder, in which the two were fundamentally on the same page, leaves no doubt that Wells has played fast and loose with the truth. The practice is truly appalling. Obviously, Wells is the piffler, not Peterson.

Southey and Wells are exemplary types, paid dissemblers representing the two poles of Peterson haters, the literary urchin who thinks she is funny and the Herr Professor who thinks he is clever. Whereas Southey is flippant and embarrassingly puerile, Wells appears on stage wearing onkos and cothurnus, a postmodern highbrow who strives to tower over Peterson and the rest of us poor prols like a tragic actor on the classical Greek stage. Southey and Wells regard themselves as above reproach but in my estimation they are beneath contempt, like the leftist commentariat in general that oscillates between feeble attempts at satire and portentous efforts at scholarship, always in the service of a lie.

More recently (Jan. 31, 2018), *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's so-called “national newspaper,” sullied any vestige of impartiality and honor by publishing its own hatchet job, in

which reviewer John Semley describes Peterson as an “absurd figure,” the possessor of a “faintly flickering intellect,” a creature of the alt-right (again!), and a “shameless huckster.” Such misrepresentations and put-downs proliferate throughout this dismal text. For example, we are told, once again, that Peterson “bemoans the social taboo against being physically violent with ‘crazy women’ ” when, as we’ve remarked, he does no such thing. The tenor of such reviews makes it obvious that the reviewers are not being honest but are pursuing a specific agenda, which is nothing other than character assassination. Neo-Marxist vigilantes attacking a modern hero, they are, in effect, literary hit men.

Nobody is claiming that Peterson is without flaws and blemishes. After all, as Hamlet wisely opines, “use every man after his own deserts and who should ‘scape whipping?” At times Peterson can seem histrionic, at times he is prone to bursts of emotionalism. His writing style is occasionally more pedestrian than elegant, and his narratives occasionally carry a flavor of the bizarre (see pages 290-294 of his [book](#) by wishing his readers “all the best” and hopes “that you can wish the best for others.” We wholeheartedly wish the best for Jordan Peterson. As we say in the holy tongue: *refuah sheleimah*. May he prosper and be in good health.

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