

Jordan Bernt Peterson (*1962)

Jordan Bernt Peterson is a Canadian clinical psychologist and a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto (as of 2019). Since late 2016 Peterson has become known to a global audience as a controversial public intellectual with views decidedly informed by the Analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung and the existentialist and / or religious philosophies of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, among others. Peterson's ideas – gravitating around epistemological, ontological, and ethical questions – are most prominently articulated in his two monographs *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (1999) and *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (2018) as well as on his own YouTube channel, where Peterson has continued to post videos of his comments, lectures, and debates on various subjects.

Peterson is significant for the study of (contemporary) esotericism for at least two reasons: Firstly, Peterson incarnates a Jungian brand of esotericism, thereby acting as a catalyst for esoteric concepts on a global scale. Secondly, Peterson introduces said concepts – e.g. the primordial dynamics of *order* and *chaos* – as seemingly self-evident talking points, effectively re-mystifying them and obfuscating their historical context of origin, which is tied to Orientalist scholarship and Euro-American history of the nineteenth century. The (psycho)therapeutic rhetoric, which Peterson has used to convey his philosophy, is infused with explicit esoteric terminology such as *alchemy*, *archetypes*, and *myth* along with a variety of implicitly employed esoteric ideas such as the importance to attain a higher understanding of human existence and the need to differentiate between inner (esoteric) and outer (exoteric) knowledge. The latter distinction serves as Peterson's esoteric framework for his interpretations of religious (mostly Biblical) scriptures as well as his public lectures and talks, where Peterson tends to project an image of a charismatic scientist / scholar imbued with deep insights into the nature of Being.

Peterson has come to be widely regarded as a polarising figure due to the political implications of his fusion of religious and scientific narratives and his imperative to strive for a meaningful life as a balancing act between cultural / political / psychological *order* and *chaos*. While opponents on the political left have often criticised Peterson's insistence on binary gender differences and his condemning attacks on postmodern philosophy as reactionary attempts to turn back the clock on what they regard as societal progress, allies on the political right have hailed Peterson as an advocate of truth in a time and place they consider to be dominated by relativistic demise and politically correct speech regulations. In addition to Peterson's opponents and allies, a third group of individuals has emerged, consisting predominantly of young men who regard Peterson as a spiritual guide on their path towards existential meaning. These grateful recipients have watched Peterson's YouTube videos, flocked to his public lectures, contemplated and sought to apply the twelve rules for life such as *set your house in perfect order before you criticise the world* (rule 6) and *tell the truth, or at least don't lie* (rule 8). They have also produced highly individualised accounts of Peterson's impact on their personal lives, ranging from the reconciliation with estranged family members to their escape from clinical depression to religious conversion after a life dominated by resentful atheism. At the same time, notions of belonging to an elect circle have surfaced, transforming Peterson's grateful recipients to active participants in a community of kindred spirits, held together by Peterson's charismatic authority and propelled by the engagement with Peterson's esoteric teachings.

Dimitry OKROPIRIDZE

Bibliography

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