

# Jordan B. Peterson Is the Furthest Thing from the Alt-Right

Psychologist and scholar Jordan B. Peterson recently had another surge in media attention after his blockbuster interview with TV journalist Cathy Newman on Britain's Channel 4. It was actually more of an interrogation than an interview, but by most accounts, Peterson handled it with aplomb.

His ideological critics have reacted defensively by, among other tactics, trying to cast Peterson as an "alt-right" figure. Having listened to all of the lectures and interviews included in his 37-episode [podcast](#), I can attest that that is a gross mischaracterization.

## Don't Play Their Game

For example, consider certain remarks he made during the Q&A period following one of his lectures (queued up in the YouTube embed below). An audience member asked a broad question about the recent racially-tinged conflicts that had then just reached a tragic culmination in Charlottesville. In response, Peterson noted that:

*"...the identity politics that has been practiced so assiduously and so devastatingly by the left has been co-opted by the right."*

He warns that "winning" the identity politics game is no victory at all:

*"That's not victory. You just become the most successful exponent of their pathology."*

Specifically, he warned against reacting to the identity politics of the left by descending into a white racial identity politics of the right. That, he said, would be just another instance of the recent broad trend...

*"...where we're making your group identity the most important thing about you. I think that's reprehensible. I think it's devastating. I think it's genocidal in its ultimate expression. I think it will bring down our civilization if we pursue it. We shouldn't be playing that game."*

Genocide is one of Peterson's many scholarly interests. He is fascinated with the problem of evil, which he sees as manifesting starkly in the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. He has made a deep study of the pathologies that result in genocidal states like the Nazi regime. And he is keen on stressing the much-neglected fact the Soviet regime was quite as enslaving and murderous as the Nazis.

As those regimes demonstrated, Peterson's claim that identity politics is "genocidal in its ultimate expression" is no exaggeration. Hitler's military invasions and death camps were the ultimate expression of the racialist and nationalist identity politics that spiritually drove Nazism. And Stalin's weaponized famines and "gulag archipelago" were the ultimate expression of the class warfare identity politics that spiritually drove Soviet communism.

This is not to accuse every white racialist or nationalist of being a closet Nazi, just as it is not to contend that every campus leftist is a would-be Stalin. It is simply to understand that mass atrocity is the logical conclusion of identity politics pursued thoroughly to the bitter end.

### **The Way Out of This Ideological Mess**

Not only is Peterson adamantly opposed to identity politics, but his project is decidedly non-political in nature in

general. This may be surprising to people who have swallowed the media's attempt to paint him as a political firebrand. As Peterson said in his response:

*"You know, I've thought for a long time about a political career, really forever, since I was like 12, really for a long time. And I've always decided against it, because it seemed to me that the proper level of analysis with regards to **the solution of the problem that we're facing isn't political**. And that's why I think it's a mistake when what I'm doing gets politicized either by me or others."*

Instead, Dr. Peterson's prescription for "how to change the world properly," as he says, is for each individual to focus on self-improvement: to concentrate, not on political crusades, but on his or her own Hero's Journey. (Peterson is also an expert exponent of the Jungian psychological interpretation of heroic mythology.) As he put it:

*"The way forward through the ideological mess... is to place the individual at the place of paramount importance."*

Note that he's not saying that we should politically clamor for more individualistic government policies. Rather, he is saying that the answer is for each person, in his or her own life, to "aim high and put yourself together." Peterson elaborated on this in an interview with Joe Rogan:

*"My sense is that if you want to change the world, you start from yourself and work outward, because you build your competence that way."*

As he has become famous for saying, it can all start with something as humble as [cleaning your room](#):

*"Because the question is, how much are we contributing to the fact that life is an existential catastrophe and a tragedy?"*

*How much is our own corruption contributing to that? That's a really a worthwhile question." (...)*

*"The things you leave undone. Because you're angry, you're resentful, or you're lazy. You have inertia. Well, you consult your conscience and it says, 'Well, you know, that place over there could use a little work.' It's the same as working on yourself. And so you clean that up, because you can. And then things are a little clearer around you. And you're a little better off, because you've practiced a bit. And so you're a little stronger. And then something else manifests itself and says, 'Well maybe you can take a crack at fixing me too.' So you decide to do that and that gets a little more pristine. And soon..."*

Peterson interrupted his own line of thought at this point, but he continued it in another talk:

*"...and then maybe you'll learn enough by doing that so that you can fix up your family a little bit. And then having done that, you'll have enough character so that when you try to operate in the world, at your job, or maybe in the broader social spheres, that you'll be a force for good instead of harm..."*

Going back to his Q&A comments, he enthused:

*"You can do that! You can do that now! You can do that tomorrow! You can put your life together... You pick up your goddamn responsibilities, sort yourself out, fix up your family right, and then you can be a force for good in the culture. And if enough people do that, the ideological mess will just evaporate. It'll just disappear."*

**Do It By Example**

Alt-right commenters have accused Peterson of being naive about this. Self-improvement is all well and good, they say, but how is cleaning your room supposed to fend off the leftist barbarians at the gates?

Such critics don't understand what Peterson is saying, because they are mired in the mindsets of politics and war. The way of politics and war is to confront an enemy horde by amassing your own horde: whether it be on the battlefield, in street demonstrations, or in voting booths. It is to fight tribal barbarism by tending toward the tribal and the barbaric yourself. But the way of the heroic, civilized individual is to lead by example and to lead by appealing to the interests of those whose behavior you want to influence.

As opposed to purely political questions, with matters of what is necessary to personally thrive, individuals actually have skin in the game, and so are more open to challenging messages and less likely to cling rigidly to their dogmas. And individualism is not only good for society but for the individual soul, while collectivism leads not only to mass atrocity but personal stagnation. So many people are stuck in ruts in their lives, because they are preoccupied with politically-charged resentments and fears instead of fully tending to their own lives and relationships.

Someone who embraces individualism, not merely as a political program, but as a way of life, can have tremendous power to persuade and inspire. When others see such model individuals sorting out their lives, living free of the life-debilitating resentments that haunt SJWs and alt-righters alike, and generally thriving, that is a much more powerful argument for individualism than a million sarcastic memes. That is why Peterson himself has changed so many lives for the better. As Peterson concluded his remarks:

*"I think that's the way you show people the right path forward, too. You say, well look, we would like it so much if*

*you could thrive as an individual. Drop your cult-like affiliation. Step out of the shadows, the demonic shadows of your ideological possession, and step forward as a fully-developed person into the light. Do it by example. That's your best bet, man. That's what it looks like to me."*

I hope now you can see why painting an anti-Nazi individualist as "alt-right" is extremely inaccurate. The alt-right is mired in identity politics, is feverishly political, is driven by resentment, and adopts a war footing toward ideological opponents. Jordan Peterson, in contrast, is offering people a wholesome alternative to the alt-right: a humane, civilized, thoughtful, high-minded, empowering, and goodwill-driven philosophy of heroic individualism. Mark the difference.

For more on Peterson's ideas, also see these other articles of mine:

["Clean Your Room, Change the World"](#)

["Create Order from Chaos: That's What Heroes Do"](#)

["Portals of Chaos: A New Year's Reflection"](#)

["Fight the Cold, Resist the Chaos"](#)

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