

Philosophy Φ – Triết Học Φ

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Ngày 19 tháng 10 năm 2024

Tóm tắt nội dung

This text is a part of the series *Some Topics in Advanced STEM & Beyond*:

URL: https://nqbh.github.io/advanced_STEM/.

Latest version:

- *Philosophy Φ – Triết Học Φ*.

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1 Jordan Peterson. 12 Rules for Life

“The most influential public intellectual in the Western world right now.” – New York Times

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Introduction

“*12 Rules for Life: An Antidote¹ to Chaos²* is a 2018 self-help book by the Canadian clinical³ psychologist⁴ Jordan Peterson. It provides life advice through essays in abstract ethical⁵ principles, psychology, mythology⁶, religion⁷, & personal anecdotes⁸.”[...] “The book is written in a more accessible style than his previous academic book, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (1999). A sequel, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*, was published in Mar 2021.” – Wikipedia/12 Rules for Life

Overview

Background. “Peterson’s interest in writing the book grew out of a personal hobby of answering questions posted on Quora; 1 such question being

Question 1. “What are the most valuable things everyone should know?”

to which his answer comprised 42 rules. The early vision & promotion of the book aimed to include all rules, with the title “42”. Peterson stated that it “isn’t only written for other people. It’s warning to me.”” – Wikipedia/12 Rules for Life/overview/background

12 Rules. “The book is divided into chapters with each title representing 1 of the following 12 specific rules for life as explained through an essay.

1. “Stand up straight with your shoulders back.”
2. “Treat yourself like you are someone you are responsible for helping.”
3. “Make friends with people who want the best for you.”
4. “Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today.”
5. “Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them.”
6. “Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world.”
7. “Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient⁹).”
8. “Tell the truth – or, at least, don’t lie.”
9. “Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don’t.”
10. “Be precise in your speech.”
11. “Do not bother children when they are skate-boarding.”
12. “Pet a cat when you encounter¹⁰ one on the street.”” – Wikipedia/12 Rules for Life/overview/content

Content. “The book’s central idea is that “suffering is built into the structure of being” & although it can be unbearable¹¹, people have a choice either to withdraw¹², which is a “suicidal¹³ gesture¹⁴”, or to face & transcend¹⁵ it. Living in a world

¹**antidote** [n] **1. antidote (to something)** a substance that controls the effects of a poison or disease; **2. antidote (to something)** anything that takes away the effects of something unpleasant.

²**chaos** [n] [uncountable] a state of complete confusion & lack of order; in physics, **chaos** is the property of a complex system whose behavior is so unpredictable that it appears random, especially because small changes in conditions can have very large effects; **chaos theory** is the branch of mathematics that deals with these complex systems.

³**clinical** [a] [only before noun] connected with the examination & treatment of patients & their illnesses.

⁴**psychologist** [n] a scientist who studies psychology.

⁵**ethical** [a] **1.** connected with beliefs & principles about what is right & wrong; **2.** morally correct or acceptable.

⁶**mythology** [n] [uncountable, countable] **1.** ancient myths in general; the ancient myths of a particular culture, society, etc.; **2. mythology (of something)** ideas that many people think are true but are in fact false.

⁷**religion** [n] **1.** [uncountable] the belief in the existence of a god or gods, & the activities that are connected with the worship of them; **2.** [countable] 1 of the systems of belief that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular god or gods.

⁸**anecdote** [n] [countable, uncountable] **1. anecdote (about somebody/something)** a short, interesting or funny story about a real person or event; **2.** a personal account of an event, especially one that is considered as possibly not true or accurate.

⁹**expedient** [n] an action that is useful or necessary for a particular purpose, but not always fair or right.

¹⁰**encounter** [v] **1. encounter something** to experience something, especially something unpleasant or difficult, while you are trying to do something else, SYNONYM: **run into something**; **2. encounter something/somebody** to discover or experience something, or meet somebody, especially something/somebody new, unusual or unexpected, SYNONYM: **come across somebody/something**; [n] a meeting, especially one that is sudden or unexpected.

¹¹**unbearable** [a] too painful, annoying or unpleasant to deal with or accept, SYNONYM: **intolerable**, OPPOSITE: **bearable**.

¹²**withdraw** [v] **1.** [transitive, intransitive] (used especially about armed forces) to make people leave a place; to leave a place; **2.** [intransitive] **withdraw (to something)** to leave a room; to go away from other people; **3.** [transitive] to move something back, out or away from something; **4.** [transitive] to take money out of a bank account or financial institution; **5.** [intransitive] to stop taking part in something; **6.** [intransitive] to stop wanting to speak to, or be with, other people; **7.** [transitive] to no longer provide or offer something; to no longer make something available; **8.** [transitive] **withdraw something** to say that you no longer agree with what you said before.

¹³**suicidal** [a] (of people) very unhappy or depressed & feeling that they want to kill themselves; (of behavior) showing this.

¹⁴**gesture** [n] **1.** [countable, uncountable] **gesture (of something)** something that you do or say to show a particular feeling or intention; **2.** [countable, uncountable] a movement that you make with your hands, your head or your face to show a particular meaning.

¹⁵**transcend** [v] **transcend something** to be or go beyond the usual limits of something.

of chaos & order, everyone has “darkness” that can “turn them into the monsters they’re capable of being” to satisfy their dark impulses¹⁶ in the right situations. Scientific experiments like the Invisible Gorilla Test show that perception¹⁷ is adjusted to aims, & it is better to seek meaning rather than happiness. Peterson notes:

“It’s all very well to think the meaning of life is happiness, but what happens when you’re unhappy? Happiness is a great side effect. When it comes, accept it gratefully¹⁸. But it’s fleeting¹⁹ & unpredictable²⁰. It’s not something to aim at – because it’s not an aim. & if happiness is the purpose of life, what happens when you’re unhappy? Then you’re a failure.”

The book advances the idea that people are born with an instinct²¹ for ethics & meaning, & should take responsibility²² to search for meaning above their own interests (Rule 7, “Pursue what is meaningful, not what is expedient”). Such thinking is reflected both in contemporary²³ stories e.g. Pinocchio, The Lion King, & Harry Potter, & in ancient stories from the Bible. To “stand up straight with your shoulders back” (Rule 1) is to “accept the terrible responsibility of life”, to make self-sacrifice²⁴, because the individual must rise above victimization²⁵ & “conduct his or her life in a manner that requires the rejection²⁶ of immediate gratification²⁷, of natural & perverse²⁸ desires alike.” The comparison to neurological²⁹ structures & behavior of lobsters is used as a natural example to the formation³⁰ of social hierarchies³¹.

The other parts of the work explore & criticize the state of young men; the upbringing³² that ignores sex differences between boys & girls (criticism of over-protection & tabula rasa model in social sciences); male-female interpersonal relationships; school shootings; religion & moral nihilism³³; relativism³⁴; & lack of respect for the values that built Western society.

In the last chapter, Peterson outlines the ways in which one can cope with the most tragic³⁵ events, events that are often out of one’s control. In it, he describes his own personal struggle upon discovering that his daughter, Mikhaila, had a rare bone disease. The chapter is a meditation³⁶ on how to maintain³⁷ a watchful³⁸ eye on, & cherish³⁹, life’s small redeemable⁴⁰ qualities (i.e., “pet a cat when you encounter one”). It also outlines a practical way to deal with hardship⁴¹: to shorten one’s temporal⁴² scope of responsibility (e.g., focusing on the next minute rather than the next 3 months).

¹⁷**perception** [n] **1.** [uncountable, countable] an idea, a belief or an image you have as a result of how you see or understand something; **2.** [uncountable] the way you notice things or the ability to notice things with the senses; in biology, **perception** refers to the processes in the nervous system by which a living thing becomes aware of events & things outside itself; **3.** [uncountable] the ability to understand the true nature of something, SYNONYM: **insight**.

¹⁸**grateful** [a] **1.** feeling or showing thanks because somebody has done something kind for you or has done as you asked; **2.** used to make a request, especially in a letter or in a formal situation.

¹⁹**fleeting** [a] [usually before noun] lasting only a short time, SYNONYM: **brief**.

²⁰**unpredictable** [a] that cannot be predicted because it changes a lot or depends on too many different things, OPPOSITE: **predictable**.

²²**responsibility** [n] **1.** [uncountable, countable] a duty to deal with or take care of somebody/something, so that you may be blamed if something goes wrong; **2.** [uncountable] **responsibility (for something)** blame for something bad that has happened; **3.** [countable, uncountable] a moral duty to behave well with regard to somebody/something.

²³**contemporary** [a] **1.** belonging to the present time, SYNONYM: **modern**; **2.** (especially of people & society) belonging to the same time as somebody/something else; [n] a person or thing living or existing at the same time as somebody/something else, especially somebody who is about the same age as somebody else.

²⁴**self-sacrifice** [n] [uncountable] (*approving*) the act of not allowing yourself to have or do something in order to help other people.

²⁵**victimize** [v] [often passive] **victimize somebody** to make somebody suffer unfairly because you do not like them, their opinions or something that they have done.

²⁶**rejection** [n] [uncountable, countable] **1.** the act of refusing to accept or consider something; **2.** the act of refusing to accept somebody for a job or position; **3.** the decision not to use, sell, publish, etc. something because its quality is not good enough; **4. rejection (of something)** an occasion when somebody’s body does not accept a new organ after a transplant operation, by producing substances that attack the organ; **5.** the act of failing to give a person or an animal enough care or affection.

²⁷**gratification** [n] [uncountable, countable] (*formal*) the state of feeling pleasure when something goes well for you or when your desires are satisfied; something that gives you pleasure, SYNONYM: **satisfaction**.

²⁸**perverse** [a] showing a deliberate & determined desire to behave in a way that most people think is wrong, unacceptable or unreasonable.

²⁹**neurological** [a] relating to nerves or to the science of neurology.

³⁰**formation** [n] **1.** [uncountable] the action of forming something; the process of being formed; **2.** [countable] a thing that has been formed, especially in a particular place or in a particular way; **3.** [countable, uncountable] a particular arrangement or pattern of people or things.

³¹**hierarchy** [n] **1.** [countable, uncountable] a system, especially in a society or an organization, in which people are organized into different levels of importance from highest to lowest; **2.** [countable] a system that ideas or beliefs can be arranged into.

³²**upbringing** [n] [singular, uncountable] the way in which a child is cared for & taught how to behave while it is growing up.

³³**nihilism** [n] [uncountable] (*philosophy*) the belief that life has no meaning or purpose & that religious & moral principles have no value.

³⁴**relativism** [n] [uncountable] the belief that truth is not always & generally valid, but can be judged only in relation to other things, e.g. your personal situation.

³⁵**tragic** [a] **1.** making you feel very sad, usually because somebody has died or suffered a lot; **2.** [usually before noun] connected with tragedy (= the style of literature).

³⁶**meditation** [n] **1.** [uncountable] the practice of thinking deeply, usually in silence, especially for religious reasons or in order to make your mind calm; **2.** [countable, usually plural] **meditation (on something)** serious thoughts on a particular subject that somebody writes down or speaks.

³⁷**maintain** [v] **1. maintain something** to cause or enable a condition or situation to continue, SYNONYM: **preserve**; **2. maintain something** to keep something at the same level or rate; **3.** to state strongly that something is true, even when some other people may not believe it; **4. maintain somebody/something** to support somebody/something over a long period of time by providing money, paying for food, etc.; **5. maintain something** to keep a building, machine, etc. in good condition by checking or repairing it regularly; **6. maintain a record** to write something down as a record & keep adding the most recent information, SYNONYM: **keep**.

³⁸**watchful** [a] paying attention to what is happening in case of danger, accidents, etc.

³⁹**cherish** [v] (*formal*) **1. cherish somebody/something** to love somebody/something very much & want to protect them or it; **2. cherish something** to keep an idea, a hope or a pleasant feeling in your mind for a long time.

⁴⁰**redeemable** [a] **redeemable (against something)** that can be exchanged for money or goods.

⁴¹**hardship** [n] [uncountable, countable] a situation that is difficult & unpleasant because you do not have enough money, food, clothes, etc.

⁴²**temporal** [a] **1.** connected with or limited by time; **2.** connected with the real physical world, not spiritual matters; **3.** (*anatomy*) near the temples at the side of the head.

“The most influential public intellectual⁴³ in the Western world right now.” – New York Times

1.1 Foreword by Noman Doidge

“Rules? More rules? Really? Isn’t life complicated enough, restricting enough, without abstract rules that don’t take our unique, individual situations into account? & given that our brains are plastic, & all develop differently based on our life experiences, why even expect that a few rules might be helpful to us all?

People don’t clamor for rules, even in the Bible ... as when Moses comes down the mountain, after a long absence, bearing the tablets inscribed with 10 commandments, & finds the Children of Israel in revelry. They’d been Pharaoh’s slaves & subject to his tyrannical regulations for 400 years, & after that Moses subjected them to the harsh desert wilderness for another 40 years, to purify them of their slavishness. Now, free at last, they are unbridled, & have lost all control as they dance wildly around an idol, a golden calf, displaying all manner of corporeal corruption.

“I’ve got some good news ... & I’ve got some bad news,” the lawgiver yells to them. “Which do you want 1st?”

“The good news!” the hedonists reply.

“I got Him from 15 commandments down to 10!”

“Hallelujah!” cries the unruly crowd. “& the bad?”

“Adultery is still in.”

So rules there will be – but, please, not too many. We are ambivalent about rules, even when we know they are good for us. If we are spirited souls, if we have character, rules seem restrictive, an affront to our sense of agency & our pride in working out our own lives. Why should we be judged according to another’s rule?

& judged we are. After all, God didn’t give Moses “The 10 Suggestions,” he gave Commandments; & if I’m a free agent, my 1st reaction to a command might just be that nobody, not even God, tells me what to do, even if it’s good for me. But the story of the golden calf also reminds us that without rules we quickly become slaves to our passions – & there’s nothing freeing about that.

& the story suggests something more: unchaperoned, & left to our own untutored judgment, we are quick to aim low & worship qualities that are beneath us – in this case, an artificial animal that brings out our own animal instincts in a completely unregulated way. The old Hebrew story makes it clear how the ancients felt about our prospects for civilized behavior in the absence of rules that seek to elevate our gaze & raise our standards.

1 neat thing about the Bible story is that it doesn’t simply list its rules, as lawyers or legislators or administrators might; it embeds them in a dramatic tale that illustrates why we need them, thereby making them easier to understand. Similarly, in this book Prof. Peterson doesn’t just propose his 12 rules, he tells stories, too, bringing to bear his knowledge of many fields as he illustrates & explains why the best rules do not ultimately restrict us but instead facilitate our goals & make for fuller, freer lives. p. 6

” – [[Pet18](#), pp. 5–]

1.2 Overture

1.3 Rule 1: Stand Up Straight with Your Shoulders Back

1.4 Rule 2: Treat Yourself Like Someone You Are Responsible for Helping

1.5 Rule 3: Make Friends with People Who Want The Best for You

1.6 Rule 4: Compare Yourself to Who You Were Yesterday, Not to Who Someone Else Is Today

1.7 Rule 5: Do Not Let Your Children Do Anything That Makes You Dislike Them

1.8 Rule 6: Set Your House In Perfect Order Before You Criticize The World

1.9 Rule 7: Pursue What Is Meaningful (Not What Is Expedient)

1.9.1 Get While The Getting’s Good

“Life is suffering. That’s clear. There is no more basic, irrefutable truth. It’s basically what God tells Adam & Eve, immediately before he kicks them out of Paradise.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow & thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring 4th children; & thy desire shall be to thy husband, & he shall rule over thee.

& unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, & hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Thorns also & thistles shall it bring 4th to thee; & thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

⁴³**intellectual** [a] [usually before noun] connected with or using a person’s ability to think in a logical way & understand things, SYNONYM: **mental**; [n] a person who is well educated & enjoys activities in which they have to think seriously about things.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are & to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:16-19. KJV)

What in the world should be done about that?

The simplest, most obvious, & most direct answer? Pursue pleasure. Follow your impulses. Live for the moment. Do what’s expedient. Lie, cheat, steal, deceive, manipulate – but don’t get caught. In an ultimately meaningless universe, what possible difference could it make? & this is by no means a new idea. The fact of life’s tragedy & the suffering that is part of it has been used to justify the pursuit of immediate selfish gratification for a very long time.

Short & sorrowful is our life, & there is no remedy when a man comes to his end, & no one has been known to return from Hades.

Because we were born by mere chance, & hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, & reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts.

When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, & the spirit will dissolve like empty air. Our name will be forgotten in time & no one will remember our works; our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, & be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun & overcome by its heat.

For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, & there is no return from our death, because it is sealed up & no one turns back.

Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, & make use of the creation to the full as in youth.

Let us take our fill of costly wine & perfumes, & let no flower of spring pass by us.

Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither.

Let none of us fail to share in our revelry, everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, & this our lot.

Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow nor regard the gray hairs of the aged.

But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.

(Wisdom 2:1-11, RSV).

The pleasure of expediency may be fleeing, but it’s pleasure, nonetheless, & that’s something to stack up against the terror & pain of existence. Every man for himself, & the devil take the hindmost, as the old proverb has it. Why not simply take everything you can get, whenever the opportunity arises? Why not determine to live in that manner?

Or is there an alternative, more powerful & more compelling?

Our ancestors worked out very sophisticated answers to such questions, but we still don’t understand them very well. This is because they are in large part still implicit – manifest primarily in ritual & myth &, as of yet, incompletely articulated. We act them out & represent them in stories, but we’re not yet wise enough to formulate them explicitly. We’re still chimps in a troupe, or wolves in a pack. we know how to behave. We know who’s who, & why. We’ve learned that through experience. Our knowledge has been shaped by our interaction with others. We’ve established predictable routines & patterns of behavior – but we don’t really understand them, or know where they originated. They’ve evolved over great expanses of time. No one was formulating them explicitly (at least not in the dimmest reaches of the past), even though we’ve been telling each other how to act forever. 1 day, however, not so long ago, we woke up. We were already doing, but we started *noticing* what we were doing. We started using our bodies as devices to represent their own actions. We started imitating & dramatizing. We invented ritual. We started acting out our own experiences. Then we started to tell stories. We coded our observations of our own drama in these stories. In this manner, the information that was 1st only embedded in our behavior became represented in our stories. But we didn’t & still don’t understand what it all means.

The Biblical narrative of Paradise & the Fall is 1 such story, fabricated by our collective imagination, working over the centuries. It provides a profound account of the nature of Being, & points the way to a mode of conceptualization & action well-matched to that nature. In the Garden of Eden, prior to the dawn of self-consciousness – so goes the story – human beings were sinless. Our primordial parents, Adam & Eve, walked with God. Then, tempted by the snake, the 1st couple ate from the tree of the knowledge of good & evil, discovered Death & vulnerability, & turned away from God. Mankind was exiled from Paradise, & began its effortful mortal existence. The idea of sacrifice enters soon afterward, beginning with the account of Cain & Abel, & developing through the Abrahamic adventures & the Exodus: After much contemplation, struggling humanity learns that God’s favor could be gained, & his wrath averted, through proper sacrifice – &, also, that bloody murder might be motivated among those unwilling or unable to succeed in this manner.” – [Pet18, pp. 183–185]

1.9.2 The Delay of Gratification

1.10 Rule 8: Tell The Truth – Or, At Least, Don’t Lie

1.11 Rule 9: Assume That The Person You Are Listening to Might Know Something You Don’t

1.12 Rule 10: Be Precise In Your Speech

1.13 Rule 11: Do Not Bother Children When They Are Skateboarding

1.14 Rule 12: Pet A Cat When You Encounter One On The Street

1.15 Coda

1.16 Endnotes

2 Jordan Peterson. Beyond Order

3 Meaning of Life – Giá Trị Của Sự Sống

4 Meaning of Death – Giá Trị Của Cái Chết

5 Miscellaneous

Tài liệu

[Pet18] Jordan B. Peterson. *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. Random House Canada, 2018, p. 416.