Jordan Peterson is Back! - Bret Weinstein's DarkHorse Podc...

Sat, 10/9 12:13PM • 2:13:21

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

point, genes, system, idea, argument, fact, game, chimps, consciousness, human beings, sense, behavior, understand, problem, good, argue, chimpanzees, hierarchy, impulses, lineage

**SPEAKERS**

Bret, Jordan Peterson

**Bret** 00:04

Hey folks, welcome to the Dark Horse podcast. I have the great pleasure of sitting today with Dr. Jordan B. Peterson. He is an author, a YouTube lecturer and professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. Welcome, Jordan.

**Jordan Peterson** 00:18

Good to see you. Thanks for the invitation.

**Bret** 00:21

Well, it's very good to see you, sir, I should probably tell people in our audience, that there might be some slight strangeness about this discussion, because you and I have had a recent one on your channel, which is not yet out. And so in some sense, we are picking up a discussion in motion, that those who are watching will not have yet seen. In any case, we talk in that one about your, your absence from the scene and how grateful I am to see you back at it. So I won't recover that territory here. I should say that this discussion between you and me is taking place on the occasion of the publication of your new book. Yes, book is called Beyond order. 12 more rules for life. I should tell our listeners that I have not read it, you sent me a copy, but it got hung up in customs. But anyway, I'm very excited to see it. And I think many others will be as well. Do you want to say anything about the Well,

**Jordan Peterson** 01:21

I have it here. Perfect. As you said, it's out today. It's making the scene I guess it's number one in Australia. And number two, which is quite nice. I've and 12 rules is number five. So that's was kind of remarkable to see today. And so thank you to all the people in Australia who are reading me, I appreciate that very much. I hope people find the book useful. I tried to put as much care into it as I put into the first book. And I hope that's reflected in in the book. And I hope they make a nice balanced package. The first one concentrates more on excesses of chaos, associated with uncertainty and the unexpected, I suppose. And the second one concentrates more on the danger of excess order. And those are the two great dangers, I think great. Two of the greatest dangers, the pathology of social structures and, and the danger of everything that we don't understand. And so those are two of the major things that people have to manage in life, architecturally speaking, universally speaking. So that's the basis for the books.

**Bret** 02:35

Now, obviously, this is the first 24 rules for life that you came up with. I know you've generated a long list initially when you started on the project. Presumably people should read both of those books, if they're interested in your top 24. Is there a reason that they should read the first one, before reading the second one? Or?

**Jordan Peterson** 02:59

I hope not. I didn't write them that way. I think that they complement each other. So if you read both of them, both of them are better. But I designed each of them to stand on their own. So and I hope they do that each of the chapters as well, I would say so there's a chapter dedicated to each rule also stands on its own, but they are thematically linked and they play on each other. So hopefully the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That's the that's the whole point of writing a book. And, hypothetically, I managed that.

**Bret** 03:39

And I should say that these are not the only two books you've written. You also famously, at this point, wrote maps of meaning much earlier in your career, a very different style of book, I would say, more analytical and less dedicated to providing people useful advice on how to to work through the various trials and tribulations of life do you want to say anything about about it?

**Jordan Peterson** 04:12

Well, I wrote it, obviously, to communicate with people, but I wouldn't say that was my primary goal. Although perhaps that should be the primary goal of an author. I wrote it to figure something out. You know, it was it was an investigation. And writing is a protracted form of thinking. And the advantage to writing as thinking is that your writing makes you smarter than you are without the paper and pencil or without the computer, especially the computer because the computer can enable you to edit editing has become effortless. In some sense back when you use paper and pencil. There was a tremendous amount of labor involved in editing not not Just mental labor, obviously reconfiguring the ideas but actual muscular energy, or even with a typewriter, it was very difficult to produce sequential drafts, you have to read type whole pages or, or it would become an unreadable mass, but with a computer, you can incrementally improve indefinitely. And so you can have a very long discussion with yourself. And I took full advantage of that when I wrote maps of meaning. And I was trying to, I was trying to account for malevolence of the genocidal sort, I suppose at the individual level motivation for for genocide. And then to also try to outline how that might be avoided, given that it's a pronounced human propensity far more pronounced than we like to admit. And I spent 15 years thinking about that. And that was maps of meaning. It's a very difficult book, it was difficult to write, I found it difficult to read, when I, when I've re read it, there are chapters that I really have to think hard about to, to fully understand, even though I wrote them, they, it's because I stretched myself to my intellectual limits may be beyond in some ways, all of the many of the ideas that I developed in 12 rules for life and and beyond order, stem from maps of meaning. So and certainly much of what I've done in my career, as a lecturer owes its success to the 15 years of three hour days, roughly speaking, that I put in on that book. And so it was an unbelievably useful exercise.

**Bret** 06:48

So I don't know if you'll recall, and I admit, I'm not certain of what the exact scope was, but you and I have discussed before the fact that my very first evolutionary project when I was an undergraduate working for Bob Trevor's, or working with Bob Trevor's, I did a project in which I analyzed the Holocaust through an evolutionary lens and effectively reached the conclusion that these that that Hitler was a monster, but that he was a rational monster, and that it is very important for us to understand what that means that this was too easily dismissed as insanity, rather than depravity of a recognizable kind. And yes, well, it's important

**Jordan Peterson** 07:37

to give the devil his due. And when you when you discount something of that magnitude, you risk failing to understand it, you think of it as a one off in some sense. And that may be true, although it's not as if genocidal acts are one offs. They're very common. Unfortunately, you can make a strong case that there was something particularly egregious about the Holocaust. Although there were 20th century catastrophes that were arguably of, of comparable horror, if you want to compare, dare to compare horrors, but terrible things happened in Mao's China and in Cambodia, and in the Soviet Union. Perhaps all of that wasn't undertaken with the blood, blood curdling efficiency of the Third Reich. That's part of what makes that story uniquely horrible. But i i agree with you that discounting it as a form of psychopathology is not very helpful, especially when you think that there was a whole country involved. And more than that, really? So?

**Bret** 08:56

Yes, I think, a I do think there was something special about the Third Reich, but it was a variation on a theme that is much less unique. And that in some sense, is now a problem. Because in my opinion, the only way to prevent these things from continuing to happen is to understand what it is in human nature that causes them. And that, in fact, well, alright, let's start with the dangerous argument Shall we? Go odd? Here, let me let me talk by analogy. Let us just say that all of us because for very, for many reasons, are likely the descendants of women who were raped at some point in history, and we likely all carried the genetic capacity to engage in it as a result. But most men that I spend time with I believe, are actually not Capable of this, and they're not incapable of it, because they're genetically incapable they're incapable of it, because development took that option off the table. And that there are a great many things in human nature that are like this things, that when we are born, the capacity exists, and then a proper upbringing and an environment that does not reinforce these things, or better makes them disgusting to us. takes them off the the list of possibilities. And I believe that genocide,

**Jordan Peterson** 10:33

let me let me add something to that, please, you tell me what you think? Well, there's there's two things, I think that take it off the table. One might be developmental history, and, and so you might say that there could be a biological tendency. And if it isn't encouraged, reinforced, or even if it's punished out of existence, through in attention, even I won't pay attention to you, if you do that, or I'll punish you outright, if you do it one way or another. It can't develop. But then I would also say that, in a functioning society, the eliciting conditions for that behavior are also unlikely to arise. You see mass rape very frequently in wartime. And it is quite unlike normal male sexual behavior in the context of an intimate relationship, partly because it's often at least somewhat public, which makes it unique, because sexual activity among intimate partners, is generally private. But in wartime, it can be public. And so I would say that we protect ourselves against that biological propensity, that genetic propensity, partly through socialization, by by bringing aggression under control, especially in its sexual elements, but also by structuring our society so that we never allow ourselves to go somewhere where those motivations are likely to emerge, and also where they wouldn't be immediately punished out of existence. But that can happen, I think you'll see those sorts of things happen. In the midst of riots, for example, where you know, law abiding person, and generally law abiding person will get caught up in the chaotic frenzy and find themselves doing things that they had perhaps never done before. I would like to think that it's a matter of socialization and a matter of regulation by conscience. But I do think that a fair bit of it is also brought under control by the stability and relative benevolence of the social surround.

**Bret** 12:41

Well, I think those two things, obviously fit well together,

**Jordan Peterson** 12:46

let me give you let me give you an example. Sure, from the chimps, so chimps, especially the adolescent males, will go on what are essentially Border Patrol, they'll patrol the borders of their territories, and there's usually a couple of them three, four, or five, a group, a small group, and sometimes a female or two, but generally adolescent males, if they come across a champ or MailChimp from another troop, or it could be one or a couple, they have to outnumber them generally, they'll often react extremely aggressively, and really aggression without control. So chimps are hunters, and they'll call us monkeys, for example, which are about 40 pounds, if I remember correctly, and they tear them from limb to limb, and sometimes they'll eat them when they're alive, and they're screaming away, and that doesn't inhibit them. And then when they attack foreign chimps, there also doesn't seem to be any inhibition of aggression whatsoever. It's It's, it's, it's there in its full array, then, but in their own troops. They engage in dominance disputes, and those will often escalate, but the rest of the troop gets upset and tends to regulate it. And so that's, it's looking at that sort of thing that makes me afraid that it isn't so much socialization, as it is our attempt to ensure that we always maintain ourselves in peaceful circumstances, and we never depart from those places, not if we can help it. So hopefully socialization also matters.

**Bret** 14:30

Well, I would argue that these two things work together that you have a very dangerous possibility and that by reducing the amount of flammable material around and reducing the care with which one plays with the flame, the likelihood of a fire out of control is reduced and that if you take away either one of these things, it goes up spectacularly. With respect to the question of rape, I would say you have the added feature that in order for a man to rape a woman, he has to be turned on. And so in some sense, there's an extra protection on the system that a man who has grown up as a boy in an environment that caused the idea of rape to become disgusting to him, will not be capable of the Act, hopefully. So we don't have that in the case of something like genocide, I believe we do need to make all of the various thought processes that result in warfare and genocide, disgusting so that people do not engage in these behaviors. And, you know, if we don't, I suspect we will see exactly what we are seeing now, which is people playing with the very tropes that create this impulse, not realizing that in some sense, there is a program, latent within humans, that when activated, creates exactly the the discontinuous kind of behavior that you see in in chimpanzees, when they encounter rival males,

**Jordan Peterson** 16:13

right? I think in the human case, it's actually the chimps, the chimp analogy is, is pretty brutal. But chimpanzees are certainly exceeded in their capacity for brutality by human beings. And that's partly because I think it's partly because that this, it took me a long time to think this through, and I do outline it in, in all three of my books. There's a scene in Genesis where people become self conscious, their eyes are open, and virtually at the same time, so the story goes, they become capable of the knowledge of good and evil. And it's a very mysterious story. But after thinking about it, literally for a decade or so, I started to understand, I think that it's a story about what happens is people become self conscious, they become aware of their nakedness. And they become aware of good and evil, they also become aware of their destiny, they're destined to work. And work is something that's relatively unique to human beings. If you think about it as delay of gratification, conscious delay of gratification, I'll give up something now, which is a sacrifice, in order to obtain something of more value in the future, that that's one of the outstanding discoveries of, of humankind. The emphasis on sacrifice in the Old Testament, for example, I think is a is is a, it's a historical portrayal, a quasi historical portrayal of the emergence of the idea of sacrifice, which I believe was first acted out, before it was understood, psychologically or explicitly. So you imagine, you know, you think, I do think in an evolutionary manner. And, you know, I take seriously the fact that life has been around for three and a half billion years, and that there's been mammals for 60 million, and you know, it's been seven or eight, since we split from our shared ancestor with chimps. That's a very long period of time. Over that period of time, human beings realized that they could let go of something in the present and gain something in the future. And there's, that's an, but that there's no way you don't leap from the complete lack of knowledge of that fact, among chimpanzees, to the explicit ability to state it as a set of propositions, without an insanely long developmental history. In between those two points. And human beings learned over time that those who let go in the present, at least under some conditions were much more likely to be popular, let's say with their peers. Because if I'm a hunter, for example, I could share with you and store up my goods in the form of the favor that you now owed me, which is an extremely effective way of storing food. And in a very strange way of storing it. We learned over time that people who were able to do that were more likely to survive, they made better mates and, and after that, only long after that, were we able to derive that as a principle. Anyways, back to back to having our eyes opened. When we became self conscious, we became aware of the future, along with our awareness of the future, came awareness of our own fundamental mortality and fragility, because that's associated with the discovery of the future. That also enabled us to put things off until the future all those things happen at once. The thing about human beings that makes us so unbelievably vicious is that once I'm aware of my own fragility, deeply aware of that I can capitalize on that, because I can understand that what will hurt me, will also hurt you. And that means I can start to make an art out of pain. Animals, you know the at their worst, they're predatory in a brutal manner. But human beings go way past that in their capacity for destruction. And it isn't only that the capacity that we have, because we are aware of our own fragility, and so can artfully use that awareness on others. It's also that we have motivations that animals don't have to like, very complex motivations of revenge and resentment. And they're very, very, very dark, dark motivations. And I think part of the reason it's so difficult for us to understand our own behavior in relationship to events, like, like the Holocaust is that, to really understand that you have to look in places that are so dark that looking there is, is in itself, virtually traumatic. And so people don't and I understand why, but I don't think we have that luxury. Unfortunately,

**Bret** 21:15

I would say that exactly, we don't have the luxury. And it's not that everybody needs to look deeply into those dark places. But we need to agree that it has to be done that people who are capable of figuring out what's there have to be licensed to do it. And we have to avoid demonizing them for thinking about it and discussing it. But I want to go back a little bit. A lot of what you say resonates with me here, I suspect the answer with respect to what animals do and don't do is more nuanced then, then you're thinking. So for example, I can easily come up with several examples from various species of what appears to be an impulse toward delayed gratification. I don't think

**Jordan Peterson** 22:05

I know it's there in its nascent form, and you certainly see it acted out. I don't I mean, it's built into animals, like insects, like bees, for example. It's built into beavers. You see, I think you see instinctual, there's instincts that mimic delay of gratification. And I do think it's there in its nascent form. mean like languages, for example, in chimpanzees, they can get some distance with language, although not very far. You know, it's very, there's virtually nothing that you see in human beings that you can't see echoes of, and other animals. But But, you know, at some point, a degree a difference in quantity, say makes a difference in quality and, and the self conscious emotions are developed to a very high degree. You see, elephants, for example, seem to have some sense of death. From what I've been able to understand. They do return I think they're reliable reports of them returning to places where close relative of theirs have died and moving the bones and that sort of thing. And they seem to grieve, and I've seen grief in my pets, or what it certainly appears to be grief. But you know, that certain knowledge that your life is finite, and so is everyone else's. That seems to me to be uniquely human, and it's certainly uniquely human to be able to state it as an explicit proposition.

**Bret** 23:30

Yes, I think that's very frequently where the line is. There's no question in my mind that we have clear evidence of grief in dogs in chimps, in gorillas, in elephants in toothed whales, probably Bailey in Wales. We've seen it. And there's also no doubt in my mind that in some of those cases, there is an element of what we would call consciousness involved. But the thing that is so special about humans is the degree of elaboration of consciousness and the degree to which it is not confined to individual skulls. Yes to say, our ability to transmit abstract ideas between skulls through language allows us to actually share a consciousness which is something I I believe that we do in the most literal sense and I believe is actually the fundamental rudiments of consciousness and that unfortunately we've we've botched the job of studying it because we take individual consciousness to be primary when in fact it is secondary.

**Jordan Peterson** 24:41

Well, I'm I'm of the line of an animal investigators. Let's say that, you know, there's this injunction that's frequently delivered to people who study animals that you should be careful of anthropomorphizing but I don't really like that idea. I think that you should assume continuity unless there's evidence to the contrary. And I think that's even true of consciousness. I mean, you know, people reflexively assume that consciousness is a consequence of the development of the higher order brain centers, the neocortex, the prefrontal cortex, and all of that, but you can lose an awful lot of cortical territory and still maintain consciousness. So I think consciousness is, I mean, it's very difficult to pin down exactly what it is. There's a phenomenological aspect to it, which is extraordinarily mysterious, the fact that experience exists is almost indistinguishable from the idea that being itself exists. And so it's a very deep idea. But I think that consciousness is an ancient phenomena, elaborated, self conscious, that's linguistic, that's a different story, that seems to be something that's well, comparatively new, and also comparatively unique.

**Bret** 25:59

It's at least it's at least unique in the degree that it allows us to work in conscious space and innovate. So the delayed gratification point that you were making earlier, it is certainly true that, you know, a squirrel cashing acorns is involved in something that is clearly reflective of an instinct, as you say, towards delayed gratification. We don't know how much the squirrel knows about it. But we humans can. Enough innovate, we can decide that our ultimate objective is something deep in the future. And we can in we can link together many different costs that we might be willing to pay in the short term, in order to get there and do a very elaborate version of what a squirrel or salmon or any one of a number of creatures do in a rudimentary form, but the degree to which that is distinct is so substantial. That in some sense, it's its own category.

**Jordan Peterson** 27:03

Yes, yes, well, and we can also reflect on it as you're doing. And I think the critical apart from the ability to reflect on it, the critical element there is that we can delay gratification in a way that no other human being in our ancestral chain has ever delayed gratification, whereas squirrel, a squirrel offspring be pretty much do exactly the same thing. And that's part of the innovation idea. And if they do innovate, that's usually a consequence of difference in environment between squirrels rather than any innovative capacity that's inherent to the squirrel. That's even true of chimpanzees. As far as I can tell, you know, there is some variation in tool use. But I think the simplest explanation for that is, well, there's variation in environments. So those things that offer them to the rudimentary to themselves to the rudimentary tool, using capacity of the chimp vary from environment to environment, that's the innovation, because it has to be that way, to my way of thinking because, you know, because of compound interest, you don't need much innovative capacity for it to become explosive, very, very rapidly. On the evolutionary timescale, like if you could, if a chimp could innovate 1/10 of 1% a year, it would only be, let's say, a million years before there was an advanced chimpanzee society. And we don't see that. So the evidence is, well, the innovation doesn't occur, or if it does, it's certainly not cumulative, it can't be transmitted. And that's also something of crucial importance,

**Bret** 28:33

or it exists in a bounded context where it pays less than last basically, I would argue, you would, I mean, a you do see roughly what you're describing in the 6 million year trajectory from our, our split from chimpanzee ancestors. You know, we have seen a, we have seen several cumulative booms, right, it's not a perfectly consistent rate. But there has been an elaboration of capacity. And in fact, the best argument for why our lineage looks different is that we achieved something that my PhD advisor called ecological dominance, which is the state at which it is competition with other members of your species. That is the strongest determinant of your evolutionary success, at which point you have an arms race. And so basically, human capacity for thought was built up as one group competed against another and innovated against another, which of course, would make tremendous use of language as a conduit between consciousnesses in order to facilitate adaptation. So in the chimp case, I would argue the very limited capacity to transmit abstract ideas between chimps is running up against the degree to which one can escape the limits of the ecolodge context in which the chimp finds itself. So there's the capacity for cumulative culture, even in chimps. But its ability to extract more and more from the world is limited by the ecological context.

**Jordan Peterson** 30:16

So I, I know something that I'd like to talk to you about, I have some evolutionary ideas. I've been wrestling with these for a long time about the origins of, I suppose the origins of religious ideas, the evolutionary origins of religious ideas. And so I'd like to run those by you a little bit.

**Bret** 30:35

Can I can I put you on pause this? Certainly, can you, you reminded me of what I wanted to talk to you about as a result of what you were saying in that last segment. Okay. And that is exactly on this topic. So we are we are converging here. So my point was going to be that actually belief in something like an afterlife is, it's consistent, at least with the hypothesis that evolution is extending the possible if gratification can be delayed gratification, can be delayed till after death, right? That in effect, by building an afterlife on which you reflect during your actual life, one can effectively reschedule the rewards such that it is fine by you to pay a cost that you are not repaid in life, thinking that it will be repaid later. And in some sense, it is repaid but not in the form that the mythology would tell us, it's repaid in the form of your descendants, the carriers of your genes being well positioned in their future going forward. And so

**Jordan Peterson** 31:48

it's ideas like that, that that motivated, at least in part, the discussions that I had with Sam Harris, because that's a really good example, assuming that it's valid, and it might be and it might not be like we can't tell. That's, that's an idea. Let's say your proposition is that's an idea that, in some sense, is objectively false. But evolutionarily true, metaphorically, true, but literally false. Yes, yes. But but but because it, it furthers adaptation. And it's, it's, at some point, it's difficult to, at some point, you have to make a distinct it's difficult to draw a distinction between truth as its defined pragmatically, and on the Darwinian landscape and truth as it's defined, when you're when your concern is the nature of the objective world. And, and that that was really at the core of the discussion that I wanted to continually have with salmon, I think did have with some degree of success.

**Bret** 32:55

So I agree with what you just said. And the the difficult point, sometimes I can make this point to the scientifically minded about the phenomenon of religious mythology, it becomes very difficult to make the reverse point, which I heard you just make there, which is, actually if you look at the way we do science, effectively, we start out with a large fraction of a model that we have for some phenomenon. And the large fraction is effectively, metaphorically, true, literally false. It's good enough in order to operate in the space, but it's not accurate if you pursue the phenomenology. And over time, what you get is models that contain less and less of that metaphorical truth and are closer and closer to literal laboratory truth. You never get to zero, right? As far as we know. But the fact that we get better causes us not to realize that it was in some sense, an analogue of the instinct to religious faith that effectively provides the faith to explore. Yeah,

**Jordan Peterson** 34:09

that was exactly Young's argument about the derivation of science from alchemy. No, interesting. Well, it's exactly that argument is that from the union perspective, the alchemists were possessed by a. And the fantasy was that the redemptive substance could be found in the bowels of matter in base matter, and the perfection of matter would reveal the redemptive substance. And, and now, the reason that you insisted upon that was because he was trying to account for why people became motivated to pursue pursue the painstaking behaviors and observations that made up empirical science which may not be motivationally significant in and of themselves, they have to be associated with something that is of motivational significance. So it was a redemptive fantasy. And that's also partly what convinced me that the scientific enterprise is in some sense, ineradicable Lee nested inside a narrative. And the narrative is, well, if we explore the material world, the objective material world, that that will be of benefit to all of us. And that's not a scientific proposition. That's, that's the an a priori statement of faith that motivates everything that constitutes the scientific enterprise. And so that's another example of the of the same thing. Let me I've been thinking about the development of the idea of the hero. And I suppose the like the the archetype of the hero, the, that the the hero doesn't go any farther than the Messianic story. But by definition, I would say, that's sort of where it tops out. And so how might that evolved? Well, it seems to me that it's a consequence of us living in hierarchies. And we tend to think of hierarchies as hierarchies of power, especially when we're looking at the animal kingdom, although with chimpanzees, that's and even other animals. That's that's it's not clear that that's the case at all that the wall has shown, the primatologist has shown quite clearly that chimpanzee troops are a lot more stable when the dominant male because it is a patriarchy. chimpanzees are essentially a patriarchal society. If the, if the alpha male is cooperative and generous, and kind to the females and their offspring, there's a lot less internal conflict inside the troop, and there's a higher probability that the guy in charge is going to stay in charge. And so what that implies is that strongly implies is that the hierarchy that's predicated on good faith game playing reciprocal game playing and reciprocity is more stable, even biologically speaking than one that's based on nature, red in tooth and claw. And then you can imagine, so then take it another step. So imagine you have a hierarchy, and the most effective way of moving up that hierarchy across time. So that would be something that's stable across multiple landscapes of selection is whatever moves you up the hierarchy. And the reason that that's that benefits fitness is because the females are more likely to mate with the, the more the the males that arrayed themselves near the top of the hierarchy. And so then imagine that we've been in these hierarchies forever. And we've observed successful behavior and have an instinct to admire it. Because that instinct to admire it facilitates mimicry. And then imagine that, we've learned to mimic multiple aspects of behavior that are associated with reciprocity and fair play that move people up competence hierarchies. And so we've evolved, our morality is actually evolved to match biologically what's being demanded by the social hierarchy. And then we abstract out of that the ideal, which is that pattern of behavior that moves you across the largest number of dominance hierarchies, and that actually exists in our imagination as a latent religious symbol. And then that's filled up by narrative constantly refilled and filled. And the ultimate exemplar of that has religious power. And it and the author that that inspires is, if you're thinking about it, biologically, is the manifestation of the instinct to imitate. And then you think, Okay, then you can take that one step farther, if that's true, and I believe me, I'd welcome a critique because if there's something wrong with that idea, I'd really like to know it, um,

**Jordan Peterson** 39:10

that that ideal does, in fact, end up being the most effective way to live in the broadest possible sense. And so it's valid. And then you might ask, Well, is it objectively valid, and that's a very difficult thing to say, because generally, we're not very good at looking at complex patterns as objective reality, we tend to have to reduce things to the material substrate, and we can get a grip on what's materially true as we become more and more reductionistic. But if those higher levels of abstraction, you know, like, hierarchies have been around for a very, very long time. It's not unreasonable to assume that there's a characteristic pattern of behavior that moves you up or down the hierarchy. It's not unrealistic to assume that we will Be able to note when we're partaking of that or observing it or violating it. That's conscience as far as I can tell. And there, it isn't unreasonable to note that our perceptions of that might be accurate. Now, what that means metaphysically? See, I don't understand that either. Because human beings are unbelievably complicated. We have the most complicated nervous systems that there are, our brains are the most complex structures that we know of, except for other brains. So we are the most complex thing that we know of. And so we're a pinnacle of sorts. And I'm not saying that evolution is driving towards that Pinnacle. But in terms of cognitive elaboration it has. So is the ideal form of that complex. Is it unreasonable to propose that the ideal form of that complexity is divine? universe has been aiming at it since day one, in some sense.

**Bret** 40:56

Well, so the universe has not been aiming at it. As far as I can tell, what it does is tend towards something It tends toward a kind of stability and what you're arguing I hear some things in it. Well, I didn't

**Jordan Peterson** 41:10

want to smuggle in a too overt teleology, but you know, here we are, and everything, you know, we actually did emerge. So. And it's not it's not obvious what to make of that. Maybe it could have been otherwise, you can say that, but it wasn't. So.

**Bret** 41:27

Right. So So here we are. And I think you know, what I what I get from what you're saying, and the part I agree with is that a, I think people like both you and me, are too used to having to argue that these patterns are adaptive, and therefore entitled to a whole host of Defense's that they are not generally given, or at least, they are entitled to leeway to be evaluated on honorable grounds rather than castigated for the fact that they don't match up with experiment or something along those lines. I do think or desire. Well, that's that's where I'm going next is we the thing that I don't hear in what you're saying, the bitter pill here is that ultimately, or maybe not, I won't say ultimately. But historically, the genes have been in charge every step of the way. That is to say all of the stuff that we do above the gene level, all of the cultural stuff, all of the conscious stuff has been in service of the genes. And that's unfortunate. But,

**Jordan Peterson** 42:42

but we know there is a flaw. Now I thought about that, well, look, in human beings, increasingly, consciousness structures, the mechanism that selects the genes. So here, here's an example. Let's say, I'll see if I can get this right.

**Jordan Peterson** 43:06

So imagine, for example, that, that you live in a hunter gatherer troop, and you have a great hunter in your midst. And he's great for two reasons. One is that he can hunt, but the other reason is that he shares and so that makes him a really great Hunter. And so you elevate his status. Now you you elevate his status. It's like you all vote all the men vote, here's the good guy, he's, he's on top. Now the price you pay for that is a reduction, at least on one level of your own biological fitness, because by elevating him up the hierarchy, you increase the probability that he's going to be chosen as a mate. Now, the benefit of that, however, is that, you know, you get to eat and you don't die. So but but my point here is, is that, by that continual voting on what constitutes competence and the arrangement of those hierarchies, our conscious minds have structured the landscape that actually select so the so men vote on which men are likely to mate, and then the women compete for access to that Viktor and so both men and women are behaving in a manner that privileges certain kinds of genetic manifestations. And so the consciousness is shaping the genes, as much as the genes are shaping the consciousness.

**Bret** 44:27

The consciousness is in control of the behavior, but it is subservient to the objective of the genes. And unfortunately, I think you're the situation is that you've been handed a feeble toolkit by evolutionary biologists and are trying to make sense of the world as if it was higher quality than it is. So I don't want to drag you or our viewers too deeply into the weeds here, but my claim is that My field is divided between two camps that are incorrect. One camp or the kin selection lists, right people who view this as narrowly genetic, these are my intellectual ancestors, and the other group or the group selection lists who have understood something else, which is that essentially all truism pays, and there are certain places you can stand that it appears that that is a driving evolutionary force. Whereas mathematically, it is very difficult to make a robust model of this sort, at least not a realistic one. My point would be, the kin selection is have understood one part of the logic correctly, but they've instantiated it too narrowly. The group selection is have found a fiction, but just as we were describing 15 minutes ago, that fiction has actually given them license to explore a very fertile piece of evolutionary territory, which is the landscape of cultural evolution. Right? cultural evolution does not make a tremendous amount of sense. Through the narrowest kin selected lens, it makes a great deal of sense through the group selected lens, but the gateway is fictional. And so

**Jordan Peterson** 46:15

I think you have for me, you have to bring that down to earth more before I can completely follow what what your Yeah, harass you about critiquing my specific point after that. Okay, good. So I'm trying to follow but I have some examples would probably help me, let's run following

**Bret** 46:31

you. Let's take your example. And let's put it into what I think the right way of resolving this conflict and evolutionary biology is. So I would argue that the right way of viewing this is something called lineage selection. Now, lineage is an individual and all of that individuals descendants. Okay. And my point is, that is actually a valid target of evolution. lineages can evolve just the same way individuals can evolve. So we can see adaptation at the lineage level, which will look like if you don't pay close enough attention to what you're looking at, it may look like group evolution, which is in part why the group's elections have gotten themselves confused. But here's the point, let's take your hunter gatherer band, and the case of the individual male who is an excellent Hunter, and is also valued by his male companions, because he fares and therefore his status in the group provides some increased likelihood of mating, which could be taken as an evolutionary loss from the point of view of his male competitors inside of his band. But I would argue, isn't one. And the reason is this. Let's think about this band, if everybody took a narrow view of their own contribution to the next generation, right? If all they did, if all the males did was try to leave as many genes in the next generation is possible, by whatever means necessary, right? A that's a band full of conflict, right? Now, if we look across the larger landscape, all of the bands of hunter gatherers, how much does the competition between two individuals within one band over mates effect? How many copies of their genes are on that larger landscape? And the answer is almost not at all. Right? That is to say, you can have 10 offspring to some other individuals to write and you might think that you'd beaten them by a factor of five. But there are two problems with this one. If you are closely related to him, then a lot of what we narrowly in the kin selected the traditional kin selected view would regard as a loss to you is actually insignificant compared to the larger landscape. But the other thing is, if your band blinks out of existence, five generations down the road, taking all of your great, great, great, great grand offspring, right? If it takes all those people with them, then you have not succeeded. The advantage you got within one generation is completely erased by the loss of the population within which you were embedded. So the point is, if we really understood the mindset of the individual in Rational evolutionary terms, we would understand that they in some sense will be built, they will be wired and programmed to behave in such a way both to advance their own genetic interests and to protect the long term, population well being that allows those genes to circulate right, they will effectively be protecting a gene pool. Now the group selection is will jump and they will say, Aha, you've done it. You've said that groups are valid. And I will say no, it is not the group, it is a lineage. It is the lineage protecting itself through the individual that is responsible for the adaptation here, you can dismiss it as a group. But that's like, that's like saying that I threw a frisbee what

**Jordan Peterson** 50:17

practical difference? What practical difference Do you think that makes in relationship to? What are the implications of that view compared to the implications of group selection viewpoint?

**Bret** 50:28

Well, they're subtly distinct, but I would argue in the end decisive So for example, if you take the group selection view, and you do not recognize the game theoretic instability at its core, then you may struggle to find a formulation of Marxism, for example, that realizes the full benefits of human cooperation, not realizing that the structure you build will be inherently unstable. And that you have to actually correct for that instability, which will either happen through brutality, which you don't want, right? Or you will have to architect something much closer to what Elinor Ostrom discovered in her Nobel Prize winning work about the way indigenous peoples do this very job. So I guess the point is, the group selection, I would argue, is a temporary misunderstanding of lineage selection. But it does a good enough job to allow those who are involved in thinking in a group selected way to see human cultural evolution for what it is. And that's where the payoff comes. And so my point is, we can now go back having found human cultural evolution, which is where the heavy lifting is done, we can now go back and correct the group selected viewpoint. And we can make it rigorous by looking at it as a lineage phenomenon, not a group phenomenon. And we have then a continuous understanding which then I we've gotten super complicated here. And I wish we hadn't. But I will point out, though, that the upshot of this, from my perspective, is the genes have been in charge all along, they have acted through consciousness, they have acted through culture, but those things have been subordinate to genetic objectives. But now that we have consciousness, we can look at what it is that genes would have us do. And we can actually take them out of that control position. And we must, because they contain things like programs for genocide and warfare, that we must sideline if we're going to survive. So having arrived at an understanding of what we are actually built for, we now have to turn the tables on the genes, which is not easy, but I also don't think it's impossible.

**Jordan Peterson** 52:56

Okay, so I'm going to branch out two ways they're up there. I don't I there's no objections to the argument that you laid out, come into my mind. And it's, it's obviously something you've thought about a lot. And I can't spin up a hypothesis about lineage selection versus group selection, sort of on the cuff. I would say, however, that it isn't clear to me how that argument independent of its validity is related to my original proposition that it's, it's misleading in some sense to think of the genes more in charge than the consciousness. They're looping with one another, because the because consciousness is, in fact, making choices about what constitutes those that will be elected to the status of more likely Mater's. And so that that doesn't have any detrimental effect, as far as I'm concerned on the idea of genetic. I'm not trying to devalue the power of genes across time at all. But if consciousness is selecting the mechanism that selects, then it's definitely altering the probability that genes are going to propagate against across time, I would say your lineage argument, in some sense, actually, likely makes that case more strongly because, look, one of the things I outlined and beyond order I touched on it a little bit in in the previous book, was the idea that you know, some an action, you undertake an action to, to, to, to, to gain a particular goal in a particular framework of time. So all of your actions are bounded in space and time. You don't want it to take forever and you don't want it to occupy everywhere, right? So you're, you're operating locally, but you have to operate locally. In a way this is like the lineage idea in a way that doesn't disturb your next local auction or the one after that. You have to think about your action now, its consequences immediately its consequences in a day, a week, a month a year. And that shaves off forever. And so an optimal action is one that takes you where you want to go now, but doesn't interfere with your ability to get to where you want to go in the future, or maybe even makes that easier. And so you could say, we're, we're sophisticated enough so that we not only look for patterns of behavior, to admire that work now, but we look for patterns of behavior that work now in a way that isn't compromising the future. And that's why, for example, I think that we admire and track reciprocity, and that's obviously something you're interested in as someone who worked with Trevor's, we track reciprocity unbelievably well. And I would say that's, at least in part, because reciprocity is a game that sustains itself across time. And that's actually a place where you can see our eye to the future operating. If I do you a favor, and you don't return it, you're not trustworthy over the long run, I can't rely on you. And so I'm not going to afford you any benefits, evolutionarily, or other otherwise. So anything, anything, any flaws in that, that you see,

**Bret** 56:17

no, I would say that there's another rung to that ladder. So as an undergraduate I worked with Trevor's, and reciprocity was obviously a key feature of his contribution to the field. My graduate advisor, tick, Alexander contributed the idea of indirect reciprocity in which typically mediated through things like reputation, it does not have to be repaid by the individual for whom you've done the service. And of course, this actually underlies the evolution of economic systems and the like. But I want to go back to the question you asked me about whether or not the genes are not, in fact, in some ways subject to the consciousness, there's a limited way in which that is true. Clearly, the genes are, exists in an environment in which the consciousness has a great deal of say over what the genes get to do. But here's the problem, let's take it away from people for a second so that we can see this clearly, the genes of a spider exists in all of the spiders, cells, incapable of doing anything exerting any force on the world whatsoever, except through the spider. So you might say that actually, the body of the spider is in some ways in charge of the genes well being, and that's true. But if you had a group of spiders, that woke up to the fact that their bodies were, in fact in charge, and that their genes couldn't force them to do anything, and those spiders decided, instead of investing in spider ecology stuff, they were going to invest in spider hedonism, right? Something like that, so that the spiders were just doing what their bodies felt like doing, and not what their genes wanted them doing, which is to spread those genes, then those individual spiders would indeed be in control, they could do exactly what they wanted. But what would happen is those spiders that made that decision would fail to pass on their genes. And to spider generations later, they would be gone and the spiders that?

**Jordan Peterson** 58:34

Well, I would I would certainly, I'm thinking of a bi directional fact, obviously. I mean, it's clear, I think you're absolutely right, that consciousness can make decisions that are going to put genetic evolution to a halt.

**Bret** 58:48

But what I'm saying, actually, is that we must do that if we are to survive, but it is, I believe it is the most difficult puzzle human beings have ever faced, we have to reverse we have to turn the tables on the genes. And we have to actually say, look, we have to confront the genes, the genes awarded us the most amazing computational machinery in the known universe, they also awarded us the ability to pursue and appreciate beauty to be compassionate, they awarded us all of those things as a means to a narrow genetic end, a very uninteresting one. And the point is, now that we have consciousness, and we do appreciate beauty, and we can be compassionate, and we appreciate people who have good characteristics, we have to look at what we're programmed for, and say Actually, no, the machine is capable of something honorable, whereas the genetic objective is actually 100% identical to the genetic objective of every other creature with genes that is to say, the capacity of a human being is spectacular. It is unrivaled by The purpose of a human being is no different than the purpose of a liver fluke, or an oak tree or a malaria particle, it's to pass on its genes. And given that we can now see that we don't want to be advancing our genetic interest, because frankly, that's not a defensible goal. But we do honor the things that our machine is capable of, we have to place those things at a higher position in the hierarchy. And the critical part, the difficult part is we have to do that without giving an advantage to people who refused to give up the genetic program as its primary as their primary objective.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:00:37

God, you know, I feel like I'm caught in a modern incarnation of the arguments between Freud and Jung.

**Bret** 1:00:48

Is that right? Yes, because what I'm not playing I'm not playing Freud's role,

**Jordan Peterson** 1:00:53

I think I think you are terrible an insult by any stretch of the imagination. And, and but what I hear is, jeans as in well, and and a little bit, let me just walk through the analogy. And sure, and tell me what you think. Jeans says Ed, and superego as control mechanism. So what you see in Freud continually is the idea that base impulses have to be inhibited, and that that's actually the primary function of civilization. And you know, that the brain is an inhibitory mechanism in large part. And so there's a neurological rationale for that. We shut off many things all the time. They're there lurking and ready to leap forth, but they're inhibited. But there's two ways of thinking about such things as the regulation of aggression. Let's Let's and we'd like we can work with aggression and sexuality, those though they come together, we started with rape, they come together very well there. So do you inhibit aggression? Do you inhibit sexuality? Or do you spin them together with a variety of other impulses and make them into like a dynamic and harmonic game, where they have their say, where you have access to their force, but but they're not manifest in a way that is incompatible with long term reciprocity. And then I would say, I wouldn't underestimate the jeans. Because I think that not only do they code for the aggressive impulses, which they clearly do, and the sexual impulses, which they clearly do, but I think they also code for behavioral patterns that represent the integration of those into a reciprocal game. I think we're sophisticated enough biologically for that. And that's why I think that we admire, that's why we have the capacity to admire high order ethical behavior. Now, there might be a bit of competition, you know, that so that the genes that, that control or bring about aggression have been around for so long, and are so primordial and powerful, that that, that biology that allows us to, to integrate and to recognize integration is of insufficient power to regulate them. That's a possibility. But But I think that our biology, I think the biology of ethics is more sophisticated than than mere inhibition.

**Bret** 1:03:32

Well, so, boy, there's a lot to say here. One, I think you're hearing echoes of the debate between Freud and Jung, I don't think the positions map and what I would argue is that Freud clearly has something right with respect to inhibition. In some sense, human beings have a range of behaviors that they are endowed with genetically. And then the program that they acquire through nurture limits, where those programs are deployed, it may turn certain programs permanently latent. And my point is, that's a natural process. Young is focused somewhere different, right? Freud is focused on the inhibition itself, and I must say, I'm not well versed in Freud, but with things like the Oedipal complex, the electric complex, I believe he's got it dead wrong. Me basically bought the job because he saw a pattern that he recognized, and in fact, it was a slightly different pattern, but we can return there later. My point would be, we have a natural process of those inhibitions being wielded in an ever more sophisticated way that does ever better sideline Things like violence, society is getting less violent. If you look over a long timescale, it's getting less violent, in terms of your risk walking down the street, more tolerant, etc. But the problem is that that has functioned as a means to an end. And the end is a genetic one, even though we're not aware of it, if you look at society, any society get may look increasingly peaceful. But in part, it's being increasingly peaceful on the inside, is strengthening it for battle with other societies on the outside. And ultimately, we can't play that game forever, right? There is no, there are no new continents, our weapons are too powerful. We are too interconnected, we are all bound together in one experiment. And if we continue to allow a dynamic that brought us here, to rule to govern our behavior, we will extinguish ourselves in short order. So my point is the genes and competition between lineages was good enough to generate all the amazing stuff that's built into humans, it also generated all the horrifying stuff, it is now time for us to choose between them, because in some sense, we've run to the end of the tape, we have now gotten to a place where the game that brought us here will be fatal. We can say that with essential, essentially certainty. At this point, because of the power of our tools, right? 500 years ago, a human population that was foolish could extinguish itself, but it couldn't extinguish humanity. And now we're at the point where a foolish population can take humanity out. And it's only a matter of touch individual. Yeah, even a foolish and

**Jordan Peterson** 1:06:48

increasingly, we're moving to I certainly I certainly don't disagree with that. That that danger, I guess, I, I, you know, I've always been attracted to the union idea of integration of the shadow. And that is not an inhibition argument. It's a it's an integration argument. And so I would say, rather than, and I think this is an important difference is that there's lots of ways that you can be a warrior that are in keeping with reciprocity, but allow that fundamental motivational force to still have its say, Now, let one of the things that I think capitalism is, I think capitalism is underappreciated for its vices. So it's better than war, like men established mercantile empires, then empires of war. And so, and I think, rather than the whole scale, remodelling of our group of our proclivity for group aggression, we need to figure out how to refine and, and oriented. So capitalism is a landscape of competition. It's not only that, because it's also a landscape of cooperation, and virtually everything we do is a landscape of competition and cooperation. But I see, for example, misguided efforts to insist that all games among children be cooperative as a way of dampening down the competitive impulse. And to me that that is that's going to make things worse, rather than better. Now, I'm not saying that that's what you're, what you're aiming at. But it isn't. Look, we share a common view of this problem. The problem is, is that we've become so technologically powerful that our moral failings are increasingly fatal. Okay, so what do we do about that? Well, my my answer to that, to the degree that I have one is that well, we learned to play the best of all possible games. And we bring all of that evolutionary heritage on board to play that game. And that's a that's a sublimation and a sophistication and, and it's sort of Piaget rather than Freud, in some sense.

**Bret** 1:09:20

Yeah, I would say, I think we're in near perfect agreement here, we have to learn each other's language about it. Yes, what I would say is, you know, an explosion is a very dangerous thing. But it's a marvelous thing in a cylinder where it can be used to do physical work. And so the point is, yeah, let's not pretend that we are something other than we are. But let's take those impulses and channel them to something productive and so yeah, this this is actually

**Jordan Peterson** 1:09:50

good because I can bring that back to my book now because that's what I'm, that is really what I'm trying to do in these three books is to say, Well, look, don't under estimate your downside, your capacity for mayhem? But don't assume that that makes you unredeemable. Don't be so afraid of it that you can't admit to it, that'll make it even worse, and find something better to do that. We're jealous and resentful, and vengeful, and bitter, and all of those things. And I also especially in chapter 11 of the new book, try to explain why we have those motivations and why they're so powerful again, to give the devil his due, but to say nonetheless, well, we have to get beyond that, despite the fact despite the reasons for our motives for our dark motives.

**Bret** 1:10:44

But the thing is, we know that we are capable of marvelous things. And frankly, I don't think this puzzle is as hard as it seems, if we set ourselves to it. If we're continually battling over whether or not it's real, then I don't think we're gonna make it but

**Jordan Peterson** 1:11:05

Okay, so let me let me offer you a practical problem. I've been talking to Bjorn Lomborg, and Matt Ridley, on my podcasts and their future optimists. In, in within a materialistic framework, fundamentally, both of them insists that things are not as dire as they're painted. But regardless of that, what they do point to, like Steven Pinker, I would say, is that we've made tremendous progress on all sorts of dimensions in the last three or 400 years. And there's every reason to assume that we could continue doing that, over the next 100 years, if we got our priorities straight, it's within our capability. And so you can look at such things. And I think these are hard bits of data. Although timeframe is always a problem. We're, there are far fewer people in abject poverty by proportion now than there were 40 years ago, and 40 years ago, there were much fewer, much fewer than there was 100 years ago, that trajectory appears to be continuing, we can continue to make incremental improvements in the material well being of everyone by and there's limits, obviously, and the economists and the biologists argue about what those limits might be. But one of the problems with that view is that it's not saleable. You know, it doesn't have for some reason, it doesn't have the kind of motive power that enables people to get on board and get enthusiastic about it.

**Bret** 1:12:49

Well, I also don't think, I don't think it's, I must say, I have mixed reactions. I'm I'm a fan of red lace, not so much lumber works. And I have mixed feelings about Pinker's view, there's obviously some truth in it. But I believe it goes out of its way to miss the counter argument. And

**Jordan Peterson** 1:13:14

while it might, it might go out of its way to miss the, you know, even from a rhetorical perspective. And you know, I would look at that symbolically, I would say, look, there's a, there's a tyrant, and there's a wise king, and they're both there. And if you only look at the tyrant, that's the corruption of society, then you're missing half the story. And I would imagine that pinker would say, Well, people are looking at the tyrants so hard that we need to look at the wise king a little bit more,

**Bret** 1:13:40

well, I would take a different approach to this. So I would argue that things have gotten better, the pinker pattern is recognizable, but that it is, it cannot be indefinitely extended. And that the limit is that we've come to a place where lineage versus lineage competition on a planet of this size with a population as large as we have, and the technologies that we've got is a fatal proposition, almost no matter how it plays out. So in order to take the pattern that has continued to this point, and extended indefinitely into the future, you have to do two things, one of them we've already described, which is you have to take the genes out of the driver's seat, which is frankly, in the long term interests of the genes, but genes are too dim to see it, right. So we have to take effectively, a something like a Buddhist approach to long term well being we have to become very dedicated to the idea of sustainability, and I realize how hard it is to operationalize an idea like that. But somehow we cannot keep degrading the planet and imagining that we're going to technologically rescue it. Well, I

**Jordan Peterson** 1:14:58

read your conscience. That tech well speaking, I mean, I mean, I'm dead serious about this, because you just said something of crucial importance. And I think it's at the core. There's an argument that's always going on now, between biologists and economists, I would say that they're the two camps. And they economists say, human ingenuity can continually rescue us from whatever problems are likely to emerge. And the biologists say, well, never forget Malthus, and it's a matter of timeframe, which is the argument you made. It's like, well, that's working now. You know, there's that famous bet between Paul Ehrlich and Simon. And Eric wrote the population bomb. Yep, very pessimistic book. And he believed at that point, 68 I think that there would be mass starvation and a terrible shortage of material resources by the year 2000. And he had a famous bet with Simon who was a genius in his own right, certainly the intellectual match for Eric. And Simon said, No, I'll bet you that everything will be cheaper and people will be less hungry. And Simon won the bet. hours erlaubt could say yeah, yeah, well, I got it wrong by 50 years, or I got it wrong by 100 timeframes. Deadly dead. Yep. So but, but okay, we can take timeframe serious, seriously. I've been taking this idea of an intrinsic evolutionarily determined, biologically based ethic seriously. And I think that the voice of conscience is the voice of sustainability and interoperability speaking within and it's not overwhelming. It's not overwhelming, because you have to sacrifice the future for the present fairly often. It turns out that way, right? Because you have to, you have to, you have to make snap emergency decisions that might not be in your best long term interest. But the long term interest speaks inside you. Agreed?

**Bret** 1:16:58

Agreed. But less, less and less well as we have abandoned the mythology that used to undergird it. So as we become

**Jordan Peterson** 1:17:07

more secular, why would you say that's very interesting thing to say? Why do you believe that?

**Bret** 1:17:12

Well, I, first of all, the problem with cultural evolution is that if we talk about genetic adaptations, you can look at virtually any creature, virtually any appendage, virtually any behavior in a nonhuman creature in its natural environment, and be pretty sure it makes a good deal of sense, right? The stuff that didn't make sense got pruned away, it's not there to see how it makes sense. That's a tough question. But whether it makes sense, not tough, almost ever, in human cultural evolution space, that is not the case, right? We have a huge amount of noise, stuff that will not stand the test of time that nonetheless dominates our current cultural landscape. And so we can't go into it and assume these things make sense. So what I'm telling you is that, in my view, the religious mythology was doing jobs that we don't know, some of them, we can piece together, some of them will never understand what the role of a particular mythological belief was. But what we have now is kind of an intermediate level of sophistication, where we've gotten past some of the religious mythology, but without the wisdom necessary to replace it with anything that does the jobs that it was doing. And so we're now screwing up left and right. You know, that's the

**Jordan Peterson** 1:18:37

right way to put it too. Because most of this see what to me, what's happened is that functional mythology has been replaced by inadequate ideology, and the ideology. And I wrote about this and beyond order, there's a chapter called abandoned ideology. I think of ideologies as parasites on a, on a on a on a religious platform. They have their power, the power they have is because they derive their power from an underlying mythological narrative structure. But they they only tell half the story. If not, that's that's akin to that that's an idea that's akin to the one that you just laid out.

**Bret** 1:19:15

Yeah, I think so although I think you're being generous to call it all ideology. I'd say some of us just idiocy, right? we've, we've replaced a structure that worked, that is now not viable, because it's not in the environment for which it adapted, but we've replaced it with something that doesn't stand any chance of working and we keep, you know, one self inflicted wound after the next and either we're going to figure out that pattern and recognize that the function that we're using to generate the next level of behavior and culture is a lethal hazard, or it's going to take us out. So I would say the key if I can go back to what we We're talking about a few minutes ago, the key to continuing the trajectory of improvement that has been recognized by pinker and Ridley at least, is to understand that it needs to be based on something else going forward, that the limits of the system that they are recognizing happen, we have to go through a, a revolution in the way we sustain ourselves, we cannot fuel it on lineage versus lineage competition. However, what we mustn't do is either create a stagnation that causes the human beings to react in the way that they do when they run up against the limits of a landscape, a physical landscape, or run up against the limits of economic growth, both of which would be a disaster. So we have to create a steady state in which we don't degrade the planet. But we do give the human beings the sensation of living in a time of growth, that's gonna be the key, right human beings when they are

**Jordan Peterson** 1:21:15

I want to I want to decorate that slightly. I mean, part of the problem here too, is that I, when you're absolutely deprived, having that deprivation, remediated is powerfully motivating. But as the deprivation decreases, the motivating power of the remediation decreases. And so I would also say that arguing for the motivational viability of a more generous material landscape is also a game that is decreasing in its attractiveness. But right, you know what, one of the things I realized a few years ago was that if you're stuck in traffic, it makes very little difference how expensive your car is. There's, we've we've hit, we've hit the point where we most people, many people have enough. So that having more isn't going to be of that much utility. And I'm not talking about people who are still absolutely deprived. And I understand full well, that a large percentage of the population decreasing though it may be are still in a state of absolute deprivation, I'm not, and they and they're going to be motivated by the desire for material improvement, for sure. But those of us who are in who are past that, and I would say that's virtually everyone in North America that isn't suffering. For reasons that material cannot remediate, we're wealthy, we have heat, we have refrigeration, we have an an infinite expanse of informational technology, that can all be improved, but the improvements aren't going to make that much difference. What, what's next? Like, what do you do when you have enough? All right, so you try to make everyone else have enough? That's something right. That's something and it's worth it. But even that is a that's happening.

**Bret** 1:23:22

Right? So I realized something over the last several weeks, which is that there's something that has bothered me about the way those of us who feel fear Marxism, argue against. It seems to me that we very frequently say things about how Marxism goes wrong. And these things, I would say them very, somewhat differently than most people. But by and large, there's some direct connection between the attempt to create a Marxist utopia, and starvation, authoritarianism. And I think I know what this is. And actually it goes back to the question of group selection, which is because these systems are game theoretically unstable, because they punish those who do more and reward those who do less in order to get people who are harmed by that. That is to say those who tend to contribute more and are therefore punished by such a system to adhere to it. You have to threaten

**Jordan Peterson** 1:24:34

right there unplayable games, and you have to enforce them by force because people discover they're unplayable right? Yeah. So non playable game. I just want to elaborate that because you said game theoretic and you're going to lose, you'll know you'll lose a bunch of your audience because of that, but these are stopped me if I Mangle this, but Game Theorists are interested in the repeatability of interactions and some forms of interactions degenerate with time. Those aren't sustainable. They're not good games. As you play them, you get bored by them or hurt by them. You don't want to keep playing some games maintain themselves. And I would say we have an ethic that teaches us when we're playing a sustainable game, I think that's the voice of conscience that's related to the points I made earlier. Your may ism as its instantiated is actually an unplayable game and you gave a reason is that you can't set up a system that punishes people that are productive, and right and, and rewards people who aren't, even if some of the people are only mining productivity, and they're actually power hungry tyrants. You can't clump them in with the competent people and punish all of them.

**Bret** 1:25:47

Yeah, and if you try, in order to stabilize it, in order to get those who are being punished for contributing not to defect, you have to you have to threaten them. So that authoritarianism follows quickly on the heels, as does in many cases, the failure of the system to deliver even basic well being hence, yeah, ration. Well,

**Jordan Peterson** 1:26:07

Piaget pointed out quite explicitly, because he was very interested in games as the basis of morality, that a game that you have to punish people to adhere to, is going to be out competed by a game that people will play by themselves.

**Bret** 1:26:22

Bingo. Yes. So what I natural ethic so we make this argument, many of us who have this particular concern, we make this argument or some version of it, here's the argument that I don't hear the argument that I don't hear, but I'm certain that I believe and have believed all along is that equality of outcome, even if you could achieve it is in and of itself, not desirable, and certainly unjust, that I would love to talk about that. I thought you might. So my argument is very simple, right? What you want is a system that leverages well being in order to generate improvements. So in other words, you want the reward that comes from successfully competing to get individuals to contribute to collective well being and mythology, mythology of our economic system, is that you're being rewarded for delivering stuff, that's good. And that's why you're wealthy. Right? Now, it happens that our economic system does a terrible job of this, it enriches lots of people who are actually harming other people. But in principle, if you were economically rewarded for generating well being, that would be a good thing. And it is desirable, therefore, that we have a system in which people who have contributed more have earned the right to live better. And people who have contributed less, do not live as well, but live at a respectable standard. And if

**Jordan Peterson** 1:27:56

coin, people would really like to talk to you about this,

**Bret** 1:28:00

they have made themselves hard to talk to I will tell you, but

**Jordan Peterson** 1:28:03

yes, well, they're hoping it's incorruptible, you know, it can't be gamed as easily. And it's an interesting argument. There's aspects of the argument that are very interesting. Yes,

**Bret** 1:28:12

they're they they're certainly onto something. They seem to think they've found the ultimate solution to all sorts of problems, whereas I think they found a very promising Avenue, but not a solution. I remain to be convinced of that. But in any case, the point is, we on the left, you will very frequently hear that inequality is evidence of injustice.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:28:39

Yes, I definitely wanted to return to that. So continue.

**Bret** 1:28:44

And this is not the case, a system in which people were armed with high quality tools with which to compete, in which competition rewarded behavior that contributed to our collective well being and did not reward behavior where we harm each other, that would be a good system in which people would end up living on equally, now it might not be a massive level of inequality, it might be more limited. But nonetheless, the point is, those who would shoot for a system in which we all end up with exactly the same amount are actually setting us up for a very a despicable and unjust outcome. Whereas a system in which the ability to earn a higher quality of living is available to you and you have the tools with which to pursue it is a desirable system.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:29:37

Okay, so let me add something to that. Sure. Okay, so it Isn't that obvious when you're talking about outcome and when you're talking about right now, I don't mean you I mean in general. So like, you have an array of talents and abilities and, and some of those are, what you're going to use to pursue your outcome but some of them are already outcomes. Okay, so so it's not obvious what's the difference between an outcome and inability? Now you want to you also want to, if everyone was equal, no one could trade. Because you wouldn't have anything to offer me, you have to offer me something I don't have. Now you might say the fact that you have something I don't isn't an outcome, but already said, what exactly constitutes the outcome is blurry. It's arbitrary. Now. All you have to bring to the world is what is unequal about you. And so unless and you'd think that people who push on the diversity end of things would recognize that above all else. And so to buy my forcing equality, you actually destroy what everyone has to bring to the table to trade. And that's a terrible thing, because, well, because you punish them, then for the best thing they have. That's one terrible thing. But the other thing is you deprive everyone of the opportunity to benefit from everyone bringing what's unique about them to the table. So I would say there's a, there's a terrible contradiction between diversity as a value and equality of outcome as a desire. Those two things aren't, I don't see how they're logically combined, commensurate.

**Bret** 1:31:33

That's a very interesting point, I really, I really like it. That, in effect, our collective well being is a matter of the creation of wealth through the exchange, and the exchange inherently requires an inequality.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:31:50

Yes, you even work for the inequality, because let's say, you're only as good as everyone else that suck at everything. Well, then you're gonna go out and educate yourself like mad about something, right? till you're now a marketable commodity. And you should, and so you're making yourself, you're increasing the amount of inequality consequences, but that's actually a virtue. No, no,

**Bret** 1:32:13

there is another way of putting it is that in order for all of the jobs to get done, that make us collectively robust and well off, people have to arbitrage things that are under valued. In other words, if there is a dearth of computer programmers, then it is your desire to get ahead, that might cause you to go into computer programming, which is the force that ensures that there are enough computer programmers in the next round of the game. And if you don't have that motivation, because everybody has been slated for an equal outcome, then the point is, there's no telling what you'll have too many of and too few of in the next round, because there's no reward for figuring out which thing is, is his

**Jordan Peterson** 1:33:03

worst part is a punish there's a punishment for being exceptional because your exceptionality is exists in violation of the principle of equality.

**Bret** 1:33:15

Yes, it's I mean, it's a it's the Harris Harrison Bergeron dystopia. And so, anyway, I didn't want to drag us too far down the road here. But I do want to say that I think both of these arguments against anything Marxist must be on the table, right? Not only does it devolve into something authoritarian and ineffective at feeding people. But it also wouldn't be desirable, even if it didn't, it would be horrifying. And so, I want to put that, as a counterpoint to what I was arguing for before, which is, in order for us to continue through the next several 100 years, let's say and to continue to enjoy a high quality of living, we have to retool the objectives of the system. So that they give the human beings the somatic sensations that they need, we have to feel that we are living in a time of growth because we will be less violent if we feel the sensation of growth. I think your point about integrating the dangerous components of the human psyche with the productive components is probably key to this as well. In other words, and in fact, we can see many examples of this right. So for example, if we look into the past, before widely available birth control, for example, before widely available birth control, women, were wise to avoid engaging in behavior that might cause them. To have to raise a child alone, because that's a very expensive mistake to make. The fact of women being careful about that made sexual relationships with women scarce, they had a high bar to them. And when they had a high bar to them, that created an awful lot of motivation for straight males to achieve things, right. And so, the point is, okay, we pulled the plug on that system, sex became common, people are now much more or straight males are much less likely to have incentive to participate in the system. So maybe we've substituted a pure financial incentive for what was once a romance incentive. Right. So that's one example. Another example might be the, the case of the way, once upon a time, corporations used to deal with their career employees, right, who came in at some rung of the ladder, and every year or two was awarded a bonus or you know, a raise and an increase in the benefits that they had access to. And that creates a kind of sensation of growth, even if the economy was stagnant. And so in any case, what I'm arguing is that there have been things in the past that functioned, so as to create the correct structure of incentives for a person so that they had meaning and direction in their life. So that basically, by following a normal set of impulses, they ended up likely to contribute. And then what we've got now is effectively well, very much to the title of your book, chaos, where following one's impulses is very likely to lead you to spend a tremendous number of hours playing a video game that does not contribute positively to the world, but costs you as an opportunity cost with respect to what you will learn and achieve.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:37:18

So what do you think about this mean, you can I'd like you to answer this personally. I mean, you've made some costly decisions in the last few years, and they've had benefits, they've had benefits as well, but they've also had costs. My sense is that as we face an increasingly complex landscape, and the consequences of our actions echo ever more powerfully around because of the technology, that the best place that we can start investigating to find out what the path forward might be, is in more careful attention to the voice of I said this already conscience. Does that seem to you to be because you said something abstract we need. We need this landscape to replace to to rectify the flaws in our current landscape. But getting from that, from where we are, to that point is a very difficult proposition. You know, I've been criticized in my thinking because of my undue emphasis on the individual, you know, especially by people, I would say, people who are more on the left who who maybe view things at a systems level more readily. Well, what about the role of government? What about the fact of inequities in society? Shouldn't you be concentrating on movement at that level? And I think, well, all of that's changing extraordinarily rapidly as it is. There's no doubt that there's action at those levels that's necessary. But that doesn't seem to be what's particularly germane at the moment. Was I don't know where we I don't know where else we can turn for answers. I also turned to the past, you know why? I made the presupposition which is something you laid out earlier that, you know, if, if an animal species engages in the behavior consistently, you might start by assuming that there's something useful about it, even though you might not understand it. I made that assumption when I was looking at religious belief because it was clear to me and still is, as a biologist, that human beings have a religious instinct, we have the capacity for religious experience. And so that it so so dismissing all that out of hand, because your scientific actually seems to me to be a contradiction in terms, you know, if you're a physicist perhaps and perhaps not, but if you're a biologist, well, no, wait a minute, you you run into the problem of Darwin immediately. Human beings have a religious instinct. Why is that? Well isn't a spandrel? I don't think you should be allowed to define spandrels post hoc, you know, I guess figure out why that's useful. Therefore, it's an evolutionary dead end. Perhaps not.

**Bret** 1:40:16

Well, the spandrel argument is funny, I was just writing about it a little bit this morning. But the spandrel argument is a red herring, your argument is exactly correct. And in fact, I generated a four part test for adaptation. To escape the spandrels argument many years ago back,

**Jordan Peterson** 1:40:39

do you want to define spandrel? Just so there are these people on on that

**Bret** 1:40:44

were Yeah, spandrel is an architectural consequence of placing a dome on columns, there are these sort of roughly triangular shapes. And there's a famous set of them in St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, which Stephen Jay Gould and Richard lewontin, used as the central metaphor in a paper that they wrote in 1979, which argued that evolutionary biologists were getting ahead of themselves and making up lots of stories to explain why this that and the other trait of creatures was adaptive, when in fact, they didn't have the logical basis to make that claim. Now, I'm not going to go into the whole set of counter arguments, but it's a nonsense argument on their part, there's like a grain of truth, and then a whole lot of fiction stacked on top of it, which was, interestingly deployed. Both Gould and lewontin, had Marxist sympathies, and there was the sense that so this was the era in which sociobiology was taking off, and people were realizing just how powerful evolutionary thinking was in explaining human behavior. And Marxists don't like this idea at all, they fear it because,

**Jordan Peterson** 1:42:06

well, it means that human beings aren't infinitely malleable, or we have a nature and and that that has to be contended with

**Bret** 1:42:13

that we have a nature and that we are not inherently equal, right, because in order for this to be a consequence, in order for behavior to be a consequence of evolution, more effective behaviors had to out compete less effective behaviors, more effective, people had to out compete less effective people. And so that's it runs counter to the Marxist sympathies. And so in effect, this paper based on these spandrels argued that evolutionists didn't have the evidence to claim adaptation, except very rarely. So the

**Jordan Peterson** 1:42:48

phenomenon could be the side effect of something that was selected for and it hadn't been selected against yet. So it's there. But it's not because it evolved, so to speak,

**Bret** 1:42:57

right? So if you were standing looking at maybe I'll I took some pictures when I was in Venice recently. And I took some pictures of the spandrels for the purpose of talking about them on YouTube. And anyway, so these these triangular spaces that are left when you place this dome on top of these columns have been filled with mosaics. In the central one, they've been filled with mosaics of the four evangelists. And so their point was, you could look at these and you could say that the purpose of the spandrel is to house these mosaics when in fact, the spandrel is an accident, and the mosaics are something that opportunistically was placed there. So why did that come up here we were talking about, Oh, you were talking about religion and whether or not it was justified to imagine that it was serving some adaptive purpose by virtue of the fact that human beings seem to have a propensity for religious belief. And I 100% agree with this argument. I've made this argument myself. The cost of religion to humans is so great that it must be paying that and much more, at least historically, in order for it to have been a feature of every important civilization. So that argument is completely robust. As far as I'm concerned, now. I'm trying to recover there was a thread that was the central argument that you were making has to do with Oh, yes. You, you got it. Sometimes it's a it's a mire of weeds but okay. The point was this you are sometimes taken to task for being overly focused on personal responsibility and neglecting the collective well being functioning of society level. Now as luck would have it, that was actually on my list of things to talk to you about today. Because the here's what I have learned as a A lifelong liberal, who has now gotten to an age where wisdom is beginning to dawn, is, there is something about the personal responsibility argument that is absolutely essential. And there is a reason that it looms so large in the minds of so many high quality thinkers, in spite of what it doesn't do. The reason is, if you're going to advise somebody or some small group of people on how to approach life, it's the slam dunk winner, right? It actually works, you do have power over yourself, and how you interact with the world. So if you encounter a system, that's very unfair, you can complain about the unfairness, and you have a very low chance of affecting it at all. Or you can say, well, it may be unfair, but I'm gonna play the cards I've been dealt as well as I can. And that's something over which you have a tremendous amount of control. So I think there's a way in which the, just in terms of return on investment, there's almost no return on the investment in complaining about a broken system, there's tremendous returns to be had.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:46:19

Especially true, if you're not already competent, and seem to be competent, maybe you have some ghost of a chance of changing things, if you are competent, and are seem to be competent. But before then you can break things, but building them, that's pretty damn hard. And so, and you can work locally, and then you have some chance of success. And you can find out what is under your control. And then maybe you can turn yourself into someone who can make cautious systemic adjustments, and have them be for the good rather than then for harm. Whereas,

**Bret** 1:47:01

whereas if you take the other approach, and you say, well, the system isn't fair, and I'm going to change the system, but you don't invest in your own competence, then a you're unlikely to fix the system. But even if you do, you still don't arrive in it competent. And so you're still going to be out competed by people who did invest in personal responsibility. So in some sense, it's just a loser of a position from the point of view of an individual's allocation of their time and effort. On the other hand, let's say so, you know, I first started thinking about this when I encountered a number of black conservatives, who had initially I didn't understand why there were black conservatives, because it seemed like the system is unfair to blacks, I know this to be true. And so putting the responsibility on the individual didn't make sense to me. But then I realized this, that I've what I've just said to you that from the point of view of helping people, this is the winner as the argument goes, and the other one doesn't even work. But here's the problem with it. Let's say that you, you get the attention of a number of people who are deciding between whether to complain about the unfairness of the system, or invest in personal responsibility, and you convince them that personal responsibility is the best answer. Okay, they will do better, they will do better at somebody else's expense, they will outcompete someone else. And it may be that you haven't increased the amount of wealth in their quadrant of the system at all. And so while you've given them good advice for not ending up at the short end of the stick, you didn't solve a problem. It just shifted where it went. So there

**Jordan Peterson** 1:48:42

I think, though, that would be I think that would be more dangerous if personal responsibility was directly associated with like socio economic success as a, as an infallible marker of that responsibility. It's partly why I concentrated concentrate more on on ethical behavior, and grounding responsibility in that because I think that if I don't think that you have to gain at the expense of other people, if you play the game properly, I think you can gain it's hard. And it's hard to do this, but you can. You can play the game so that the people around you benefit at the same time you do and that's actually a better game anyways, even for you. And I know that can run into zero sum problems. But no matter what you do, it can run into zero sum problems. I think it has the best chance of minimizing those zero sum problems over the long run. You know, so you play the game and you don't cheat. So if you're going to be a plumber, then you're a good plumber and that's good because no one wants their basement full of sewage. It doesn't hurt anyone. You outcompete some of the plumbers who aren't doing so well, but

**Bret** 1:49:59

so I agree with you completely, you can generate some wealth by increasing your capacity, which means it's not zero sum, you ultimately may run into a zero sum game in which the fact is some somebody is going to be the loser.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:50:12

Part of the reason that I wrote the second book beyond order was to state something like, Look, try to be successful, try to be responsible. But if you find out that you're being successful in a zero sum game, and your success is at the expense of someone else, then you change the system. Perfect. That's why it's beyond order. It's like, because your point is something like, well, if the game is unfair, and you're good at it, then you just get better at exploitation. It's like, right, right. Of course, systems can be corrupt. And then if you're a good player in that game, then you're the best at being corrupt. But that's the situation where you have an ethical obligation to move beyond your responsibility and to adjust the game. That's how it looks to me,

**Bret** 1:51:00

right? Oh, no, we've landed in exactly the same place. That's that's the point is that the problem is that the system is effectively in breach of contract, which doesn't say anything at all about whether or not your best move is to complain about the system or invest in

**Jordan Peterson** 1:51:17

right. Personally, I wouldn't say it's also an eternal truth that the system is in breach of contract. That's an existential reality. It's always in now, to a greater or lesser degree, let's because there are systems that are completely unplayable, and there are systems that are relatively playable, but the the idea that your conscience should be bothered by the corruption of the system is like absolutely true. But that doesn't mean that you should go making incautious changes as a consequence of resentment.

**Bret** 1:51:47

Right? So now, the present looks so insane from this perspective that you and I appear to share, right? where we are now educating children every younger in obsessing about defects of the system, many of them imaginary, right, rather than giving them competence. In fact, we are demonizing the very acquisition of competent they're

**Jordan Peterson** 1:52:12

perfect. That's exactly so that's, that's something that needs to be broadcast everywhere. I think that the what's that the pathology that's, that's at the core of the culture war is an attack on competence itself. It's an attack on competence, the idea of competence as well. That's why the, the critiques of meritocracy emerge, or that's at least part of the motivation for that. And everyone, you know, you can say, Well, look, do you rise according to your merit? It's like, partly, okay, partly, and to end corruption reduces the correlation. But to say partly, and to admit to the existence of some corruption is not the same thing at all as to say, merit itself is a corrupt idea. Right? That's a completely different set of propositions with completely different outcomes.

**Bret** 1:53:11

Totally agree. And so we are constantly in this battle where if we say anything, in defense of the idea of merit or meritocracy, we are understood to have claimed that we live in a meritocracy. And what's more, a perfect one. And then this is used to, to remove any impulse towards the acquisition of capacity, and to do this to children is so terrible.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:53:37

It's terrible. Yes, it's the worst of all possible things you can do to children because you punish them for their virtues.

**Bret** 1:53:43

Right? You're not giving them brain damage, you're giving them mind damage. You're damaging their mind.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:53:49

I looked at what happened in Boston this week, when so a number of the schools for the gifted were, my understanding is were closed down because of racial inequality in their makeup. And I thought, well, it's, it's obviously an undesirable, obviously problematic. But why should I assume that the motives of those who shut down the gifted system is the remediation of racism rather than an assault on the gifted because it's them that suffer immediately for it. Right now, you know, maybe that's unfair, but but I can't I can't help but think that what we are seeing in the guise of virtue is an assault on the idea of an assault on competence. The thing is, competence presupposes value and value presupposes a hierarchy. So if you admit to competence, you admit to a value hierarchy and differential ability, and that is flies in the face of equality. So So

**Bret** 1:54:56

I completely, completely agree and the obvious thing, Of course, is irrespective of how unfair the system is, you should invest in your own competence, you should make use of what tools you have, and then we collectively ought to democratize the tools as well as we can. Yes, society is clearly best, and it is the morally only acceptable thing for

**Jordan Peterson** 1:55:21

self interested thing. Ultimate, I would rather that you were more competent. Now, if you're head to head into competition with me, I might let resentment, you know, allow me to desire your destruction. But all things considered, if you're competent, well, great, then you're going to offer me something. Okay. So we could agree perhaps that there is an element of the war on competence. That's the pathological end of this culture war that we're seeing. And we should also say that there is no doubt also a fair bit of attempts to rectify the terrible consequences of power based inequality. Right, so the good is intermingled with the bad but we have to pay attention to the bad, then another question would arise would be, and I don't know the answer to this at all. If we're seeing the rise of something like the war on competence, why are we seeing it? And why now?

**Bret** 1:56:20

Yeah, that's a tough one. Let's put it this way. I do not know of any evidence that it is our global enemies seeding this, but they could hardly have done better. Right? Were they to try to get us to sabotage ourselves, they could hardly have done better than to get us to demonize our own competence, and to sabotage our own children. I mean, the thing that I can't get over is, all right, if we woke up and came to our senses tomorrow, how long would it take for all of the nonsense to clear the system and for us to get back to the level of competence that we were headed towards? I mean, this is we're talking about, you know, the arguments have gotten particularly stupid in the last couple of years. But the overarching degradation of the system by those who didn't believe in competence in the first place, goes back decades, and has had a tremendous effect. And you know, what, the bridges aren't falling down yet, not in large numbers. But that's by virtue of the fact that they were built by competent people. And they don't require, you know, yearly maintenance, and this is going to catch up to us. It is time for us to, to return to our senses, and get back to business right quick, or we are going to leave ourselves vulnerable to people who care so much less about freedom, and about justice than we do.

**Jordan Peterson** 1:57:54

Do you? I'm trying to, to to understand, again, why this might be occurring. I mean, one possibility bread. And this would be something interesting to consider at least briefly is like, Do you trust your sampling of the data that indicate this is happening, you and I are in a particular position, and we share it, we're going to be much more sensitive to that kind of information. And we're going to be provided with it preferentially by other people. Now I look and I see especially what's happening in the education system, for example, I saw the some crip killer material for anti racist math. Claiming, for example, that getting the right answer was indicative of white supremacist culture domination, and so is showing your work. Ridiculous propositions but then, you know, I don't know how widespread that material is, I don't know how influential it is. I'm, I don't know who to trust, to report on those things to me. And I don't know how to escape from what might be the bubble that I'm in because of my particular situation. So thoughts on that?

**Bret** 1:59:14

Oh, many? A, there's no good way of doing the analysis, because what we have is sampling bias everywhere. And what's worse, it's not even consistent, because we don't know how the algorithms are modified when they're changed in what way they're changed. You can't it's a moving target. On the other hand, the material you're referencing, with respect to mathematics, showing your work, focusing on the right answer, etc, being somehow associated with white supremacy. That is, that was funded by the Gates Foundation. I

**Jordan Peterson** 1:59:54

know I know. So that tells you some Android backed by apparently backed by many influence school boards. And I've seen that the same ideas pop up in the tweets of, of public school superintendents randomly. were generally one of the things that's so amazing about that I saw one of the superintendents in Michigan had posted an image of a blackboard with some of those propositions on it. And there must have been 400 comments, some hundreds of comments about that, all negative. Yeah. And I thought, well, if I was the person that posted that, and I got 400, negative comments, I'd be so shell shocked, I wouldn't be able to leave the house for like a month. And I mean, that I mean that, you know, so I think well, how can you post something like that, and then get 400 negative comments with nary a positive one, because that was really the case and not think, maybe I made a mistake? Do you do what do you do? Do you spin into a conspiracy theory at that point? and say, Well, you know, these are, this is a coterie of people that are targeting these ideas, and it's not representative of the general population. I have no idea what who else you'd have to jump through,

**Bret** 2:01:06

as you will recall, all of these tropes about white supremacy and evidence and merit. They all involve these tricks to prevent you from discovering the truth, right? So the idea that to ask for evidence of racism is racism is a booby trap. It's a Kafka trap. And what it means is that somebody who believes this stuff, and then gets a whole lot of pushback has five categories with which to dismiss it, right? So whereas you or I might hit a particular sensitive note and say, well, that's flak over the target, right? I'm pretty sure I got close to something because of the reaction I got. Well, that requires a certain amount of care that you do it only honorably only when it's justified. But somebody else who regards any negative,

**Jordan Peterson** 2:02:04

but I also like, I also look at proportions, you know, like, if I put up a YouTube video, right, I actually attend to likes versus dislikes. I read through the comments and, you know, I'm not happy when when 5% of them are negative, you know, that's, that's so far. Thank God, that's about as high as it gets. Some of them are very vitriolic that are negative. And they certainly affect me, but I'm very sensitive, I believe, emotionally to to that kind of quantity feedback as well as quality. Well, but that's partly how you keep yourself oriented in the world is,

**Bret** 2:02:39

of course, but you know, you're actually looking to calibrate something, you're a scientist, and you're looking to understand what the actual information is, and to you know, sort the signal from the noise. Somebody who's interested in advancing a position might have a mechanism for dismissing the signal. But the answer to your your first question, which I believe is very important, and I'm glad you asked it, about, well, how reliable because I inhabit a position in the universe that might cause me to see all of that evidence, and I might be misunderstanding how ubiquitous it is. The fact is, there's lots of evidence that it's ubiquitous, for example, in the US, and I assume in Canada, every parent I know with kids in school, is facing that school now. passing on disinformation, about the nature of American history, about the relations between people of different races, school names are being changed. This is taking place in every school of Ed, it is apparently taking place as much as I never would have predicted this, it is taking place across corporate boardrooms, right. And the thing that I have for

**Jordan Peterson** 2:04:03

for evil capitalists, they're sure not very good at defending themselves. They have no idea, no imagination for what kind of fifth column they're allowing to emerge. Well, well, pernicious, that's going to be what little information

**Bret** 2:04:15

I have about what's really going on there. It sounds like they are actually being persuaded of this nonsense, which I find

**Jordan Peterson** 2:04:25

Well, I think the, like guilt, a lot of it's guilt, it's like guilt is a very powerful motivator, especially for people who are essentially ethical, you know, and you might say, well, corporate leaders aren't essentially ethical. It's like, No, no, no, just hold on a minute. If you look at what predicts success in business, it's intelligence and conscientiousness, just like in science, so it's it's intelligence and, and, and hard work slash ethics. That doesn't mean everyone who's successful is ethical, but you can't point to success and say, well, that indicates a lack of ethics unless this The system is entirely corrupt. I think it's guilt. It's like, well, it's guilt. And it's failure, guilt, failure to pay attention to pay attention, especially to the long term underestimation of lack of knowledge about what's underneath all this. But then again, you know, maybe that's just my paranoid perspective. And notice, too, because we see, we see these things. Well, that's the thing, you see these things, and you think, no, there's something lurking there.

**Bret** 2:05:27

Well, at the very least, I think what we can say is this, it is entirely possible for a person to get the wrong impression about how ubiquitous a movement is, or how far it's influenced stretches. But that we can check this in a number of places, it appears to be every major college and university, it appears to be almost every corporation, it is every tech platform, it's certainly

**Jordan Peterson** 2:05:54

every Faculty of Education, every Faculty of Education out, and that's not good. It appears to be nearly every

**Bret** 2:06:05

high school, it appears to be driving the ascendant political party in the US. So how many of these things have to be true before we simply accept that for whatever reason, this movement is incredibly powerful at the moment that this is not our imaginations? This is not us. Looking at a biased sample and overreacting to it, the evidence is this is it is controlling many of the levers that dictate the way resources are to be distributed. And that I think anyone who doesn't see the pattern is a fool not to be frightened.

**Jordan Peterson** 2:06:53

Well, that doesn't help me escape from my bubble, does it?

**Bret** 2:06:58

Well, I don't know I. Yeah, I mean, there's an awful lot of power just simply between the Democratic Party, the tech platforms, we didn't even mention, all the major news media out there a couple of exceptions. The Wall Street Journal is an exception. Fox News is an exception. And you know, certainly exceptional stories show up in mainstream news media. But again, the preponderance appears to have been persuaded of this. So I think to the extent that one can appear outside the bubble and see the same thing that one sees from within the bubble, it looks like this is this is as as concerning as we would tend to suspect.

**Jordan Peterson** 2:07:47

Well, that's too bad, I would rather be wrong and be an illusion than to be right. And to be, and for it to be the current reality.

**Bret** 2:07:55

I wholeheartedly agree.

**Jordan Peterson** 2:07:57

I also think, optimistic as I am about the possibility of what we could all accomplish over the next 100 years. I don't think we're nearly at the end of this. Because it seems to be accelerating to me. And, and the claims get more and more outrageous, and the amount of resistance gets littler smaller and smaller. You see, you see some exceptions to that. I mean, a lot of journalists have abandoned the New York Times and have hit substack. Yeah, they seem to be eking out an independent existence there. And so that looks potentially promising. That sort of thing.

**Bret** 2:08:42

Well, I think it is promising. And I think, you know, hopefully, we'll we will see more of this. The, in some sense, we are going to need parallel institutions. If we cannot retake the institutions that exists, we're going to need parallel ones in order to fight back and ultimately we're

**Jordan Peterson** 2:09:03

podcast. Right, exactly. Well, that's working, isn't it? That's another example of what's working. I agree,

**Bret** 2:09:09

which, which makes it worrisome that we now see an instinct towards censorship and the policing of viewpoint on the Yeah, well,

**Jordan Peterson** 2:09:20

it certainly made me nervous. I've had conversations on my podcast recently, that that made me very nervous. And, you know, I've been hit enough times I would say, so that I don't have quite the resilience that I once had. And it doesn't seem to have stopped me from doing this, but it certainly made it harder to do. You did you see what happened to Dr. Seuss today?

**Bret** 2:09:46

Oh, my goodness. Yes, I did. And, you know, it was obviously, only a matter of time. But I it's hard to imagine that we're here. I mean, it's not that it's not that. There's nothing to claim, obviously, there are some early cartoons that are disturbing. But you know, it's not like he defended those cartoons, he apologized for them, you know, he appears to have to have grown up. And the idea that we're going to deny children, The Cat in the Hat, because in the 20s Dr. Seuss, made unfortunate cartoons, is preposterous. And I would also say, Well,

**Jordan Peterson** 2:10:26

if only those who are sin free are allowed to contribute, we're going to be in real trouble. Because, you know, my sense is that creative people are just as flawed as everybody else. And that's flawed a lot, or maybe even more flawed sometimes, because, you know, they can be creative in their flaws.

**Bret** 2:10:45

I think that's true. I also as long as you raise it, I just want to say one other thing about Dr. Seuss, which is the cartoons that are troubling, are, they are real, and the disturbance at them, I understand I feel it too when I look at them. But I also know that human beings are wired to caricature ur members of other populations. And that's not a good thing. But we've also gotten over it, right, the fact that you find Disney cartoons that characterize or that caricature Chinese people and blacks and everyone else. The point is, we have understood that this is bad, and we've stopped doing it. And that's honorable and to go back and punish people from the period before it was understood, to be bad as if they were living in the present is obviously absurd, just as it is absurd to pull down statues of Abraham Lincoln, because, you know, he did not have a modern view of racial equality. Right? It's not we just we have to stop behaving this way. But I don't know. I'm telling you that you know that as well as anyone.

**Jordan Peterson** 2:12:01

So well, you know, that was good.

**Bret** 2:12:05

Yep. That was good. Sorry, it went so long, but I gotta say, it's been incredibly enjoyable. And I certainly hope

**Jordan Peterson** 2:12:13

for me to a frazzle.

**Bret** 2:12:16

All right. Well, I look forward to our next conversation whenever that may happen. Thank you so much for joining me on the Dark Horse podcast. Jordan, your book. You want to hold it up again? Here we go. Beyond order. And it is available as of today, which is March 2.

**Jordan Peterson** 2:12:37

Yes. And everyone get a copy number one in Australia.

**Bret** 2:12:41

All right. Hey, while we've been talking about maybe number one in other places, Canada, Canada. All right. Excellent. Well, I'm looking

**Jordan Peterson** 2:12:48

forward to reading this. And it says beyond order not destroy order. Good. Right.

**Bret** 2:12:54

glad you clarified that. Okay. Okay, Jordan. Thanks so much. Thank

**Jordan Peterson** 2:12:57

you. Yep. Bye bye. Be well.