



## Self-Help for Reactionary Male Assholes

Brian McClinton

*12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*

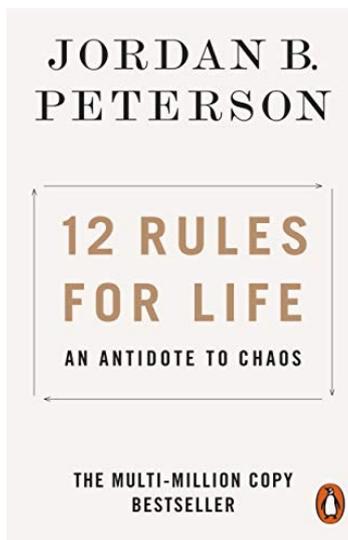
• Jordan B. Peterson • Allen Lane • 2018 • Penguin • 2019

**T**HIS book describes itself as ‘the multi-million copy bestseller’ – which proves precisely nothing. After all, 17.4m Britons voted for Brexit chaos and 62.9m Americans voted for arch-bullshitter Donald Trump. Just to emphasise the point, 10 million copies of *Mein Kampf* were sold in Germany. *12 Rules for Life* is not as extreme as Hitler’s *opus horribilis*, but at times it is a close run thing.

Immediately, you ask: why a dozen rules? The God of the Old Testament had only 10. That Peterson has two more suggests that it is not enough for him to have one over on the Almighty. In the title alone he displays his main thesis that life is a series of contests for dominance. Sounds Hitlerian? Here’s *Mein Kempf*: “He who wants to live should fight, therefore, and he who does not want to battle in this world of eternal struggle does not deserve to be alive”.

Now I know that there are those who will strongly protest that I am being grossly unfair to Mr Peterson. But in chapter 2 he tells us that order is male and chaos is female because the primary hierarchical structure of human society is masculine, as it is among most animals. Order is God the Father, the eternal judge, ledger-keeper and dispenser of rewards and punishments. Order, he further tells us, is safety and light and consciousness, whereas chaos, associated with the feminine, is frightening and unconscious and dark (how’s that for misogyny?). Life in Peterson’s view is an endless series of ruthless dominance contests in which the strong triumph and obtain access to fertile, desirable females and the weak submit, and don’t. This Nietzschean strongman pose is not a million miles away from Hitler’s worldview.

Peterson, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, first achieved notoriety in 2016 when he publicly denounced the C-16 bill introduced in the Canadian parliament to add gender identity or expression to the Canadian Human Rights Act. He argued that it would criminalise free speech and said that he would refuse to use gender-neutral pronouns if requested by a non-binary student. But he misrepresented the bill which was about discrimination in jobs and would not characterise pronoun use as hate speech. Nevertheless, he received support on social media which subsequently snowballed when young men found that his reactionary ideas resonated with their own. Here too was someone who addressed the crisis in masculinity by suggesting that the old ideas of male supremacy are right after all. He was telling them to be a macho male asshole, and proud of it.



This is not just an impression. The very first of his 12 rules in this book of bullshit – “Stand up straight, with your shoulders back” – is riddled with this idea of dominance (posture itself can be an expression of dominance). Indeed, the 12 pieces of advice are just a front for Peterson’s minestrone of observations (to borrow a phrase) on life, the universe and everything.

Some of Peterson’s advice is commonplace or banal: don’t lie, look after yourself etc. In headline form many of the rules make good sense. For example, rule 7 is: “Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)”. Drilling down beneath the biblical stories he recounts ad nauseam reveals that what is meaningful to him is a kind of Christian mysticism:

“meaning is what manifests itself when the many levels of Being arrange themselves into a perfectly functioning harmony”. As he tells us in Rule 4, atheists, however, are not only wrong but they are also wrong to even think they are atheists. He doesn’t like Marxists or Postmodernists either (he often conflates the two).

Francis Bacon wrote that men look for knowledge and wisdom in their own lesser worlds, and not in the greater or common world. Rules for life should not primarily be looking inward – the world outside is more important. They should be intellectual as well as emotional. Think for yourself, question everything, be sceptical yet open-minded, respect truth and reason, take responsibility for your actions, treat others as equals, seek the greater good of humanity, and respect life and nature.

One of the snags about writing a book of rules is that you are likely to break your own rules along the way. “Beware of single cause explanations and beware of people who purvey them”, Peterson writes. To which there is an obvious reply: “physician, heal thyself”. □

**Irish Freethinkers and Humanists**

**Monthly meetings  
Second Thursday  
Holiday Inn Express,  
University St, Belfast, 8pm**

**Next meeting: 12th September**