

12 Rules for Life, Peterson

Foreword

But the story of the golden calf also reminds us that without rules we quickly become slaves to our passions—and there’s nothing freeing about that.

Not long after the Soviet Union fell, and most of the world breathed a sigh of relief, Peterson began purchasing this propaganda for a song online. Paintings lionizing the Soviet revolutionary spirit completely filled every single wall, the ceilings, even the bathrooms. The paintings were not there because Jordan had any totalitarian sympathies, but because he wanted to remind himself of something he knew he and everyone would rather forget: that over a hundred million people were murdered in the name of utopia.

These paintings provided a visitor with the first window onto the full extent of Jordan’s concern about our human capacity for evil in the name of good, and the psychological mystery of self-deception (how can a person deceive himself and get away with it?)—an interest we share.

Ideologies are simple ideas, disguised as science or philosophy, that purport to explain the complexity of the world and offer remedies that will perfect it.

Ideologues are people who pretend they know how to “make the world a better place” before they’ve taken care of their own chaos within.

He observed that the virtues always aim for balance and avoid the extremes of the vices. Aristotle studied the virtues and the vices in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. It was a book based on experience and observation, not conjecture, about the kind of happiness that was possible for human beings. Cultivating judgment about the difference between virtue and vice is the beginning of wisdom, something that can never be out of date. By contrast, our modern relativism begins by asserting that making judgments about how to live is impossible, because there is no real good, and no true virtue (as these too are relative). Thus relativism’s closest approximation to “virtue” is “tolerance.” Only tolerance will provide social cohesion between different groups, and save us from harming each other. On Facebook and other forms of social media, therefore, you signal your so-called virtue, telling everyone how tolerant, open and compassionate you are, and wait for likes to accumulate. (Leave aside that telling people you’re virtuous isn’t a virtue, it’s self-promotion. Virtue signalling is not virtue. Virtue signalling is, quite possibly, our commonest vice.)

Instead of despairing about these differences in moral codes, Aristotle argued that though specific rules, laws and customs differed from place to place, what does not differ is that in all places human beings, by their nature, have a proclivity to make rules, laws and customs. To put this in modern terms, it seems that all human beings are, by some kind of biological endowment, so ineradicably concerned with morality that we create a

structure of laws and rules wherever we are. The idea that human life can be free of moral concerns is a fantasy.

Sccccratcch the most clever postmodern-relativist professor’s Mercedes with a key, and you will see how fast the mask of relativism (with its pretense that there can be neither right nor wrong) and the cloak of radical tolerance come off.

Overture

Order is where the people around you act according to well-understood social norms, and remain predictable and cooperative. It’s the world of social structure, explored territory, and familiarity. The state of Order is typically portrayed, symbolically—imaginatively—as masculine. It’s the Wise King and the Tyrant, forever bound together, as society is simultaneously structure and oppression.

Chaos, by contrast, is where—or when—something unexpected happens. Chaos emerges, in trivial form, when you tell a joke at a party with people you think you know and a silent and embarrassing chill falls over the gathering. Chaos is what emerges more catastrophically when you suddenly find yourself without employment, or are betrayed by a lover.

Order and chaos are the yang and yin of the famous Taoist symbol: two serpents, head to tail. Order is the white, masculine serpent; Chaos, its black, feminine counterpart. The black dot in the white—and the white in the black—indicate the possibility of transformation: just when things seem secure, the unknown can loom, unexpectedly and large. Conversely, just when everything seems lost, new order can emerge from catastrophe and chaos. For the Taoists, meaning is to be found on the border between the ever-entwined pair. To walk that border is to stay on the path of life, the divine Way. And that’s much better than happiness.

It is possible to transcend slavish adherence to the group and its doctrines and, simultaneously, to avoid the pitfalls of its opposite extreme, nihilism. It is possible, instead, to find sufficient meaning in individual consciousness and experience. How could the world be freed from the terrible dilemma of conflict, on the one hand, and psychological and social dissolution, on the other? The answer was this: through the elevation and development of the individual, and through the willingness of everyone to shoulder the burden of Being and to take the heroic path.

I hope that these rules and their accompanying essays will help people understand what they already know: that the soul of the individual eternally hungers for the heroism of genuine Being, and that the willingness to take on that responsibility is identical to the decision to live a meaningful life.

Rule 1: Stand Up Straight With Your Shoulders Back

The poor and stressed always die first, and in greater numbers. They are also much more susceptible to non-infectious diseases, such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. When the aristocracy catches a cold, as it is said, the working class dies of pneumonia.

Conflict, in turn, produces another problem: how to win or lose without the disagreeing parties incurring too great a cost.

A lobster with high levels of serotonin and low levels of octopamine is a cocky, strutting sort of shellfish, much less likely to back down when challenged.

High serotonin/low octopamine characterizes the victor. The opposite neurochemical configuration, a high ratio of octopamine to serotonin, produces a defeated-looking, scrunched-up, inhibited, drooping, skulking sort of lobster, very likely to hang around street corners, and to vanish at the first hint of trouble.

Sometimes it is known as the Matthew Principle (Matthew 25:29), derived from what might be the harshest statement ever attributed to Christ: “to those who have everything, more will be given; from those who have nothing, everything will be taken.”

Even the most brutal chimp despot can be taken down, after all, by two opponents, each three-quarters as mean. In consequence, males who stay on top longer are those who form reciprocal coalitions with their lower-status compatriots, and who pay careful attention to the troupe’s females and their infants. The political ploy of baby-kissing is literally millions of years old.

The dominant male, with his upright and confident posture, not only gets the prime real estate and easiest access to the best hunting grounds. He also gets all the girls. It is exponentially more worthwhile to be successful, if you are a lobster, and male.

We (the sovereign we, the we that has been around since the beginning of life) have lived in a dominance hierarchy for a long, long time. We were struggling for position before we had skin, or hands, or lungs, or bones. There is little more natural than culture. Dominance hierarchies are older than trees.

The part of our brain that keeps track of our position in the dominance hierarchy is therefore exceptionally ancient and fundamental. It is a master control system, modulating our perceptions, values, emotions, thoughts and actions. It powerfully affects every aspect of our Being, conscious and unconscious alike. This is why, when we are defeated, we act very much like lobsters who have lost a fight.

Erratic habits of sleeping and eating can interfere with its function. Uncertainty can throw it for a loop. The body, with its various parts, needs to function like a well-rehearsed orchestra. Every system must play its role properly, and at exactly the right time, or noise and chaos ensue. It is for this reason that routine is so necessary. The acts of life we repeat every day need to be automatized. They must be turned into stable and reliable habits, so they lose their complexity and gain predictability and simplicity. This can be perceived most clearly in the case of small children, who are delightful and comical and playful when their sleeping and eating schedules are stable, and horrible and whiny and nasty when they are not.

Do they wake up in the morning at approximately the time the typical person wakes up, and at the same time every day? If the answer is no, fixing that is the first thing I recommend. It doesn’t matter so much if they go to bed at the same time each evening, but waking up at a consistent hour is a necessity.

The next thing I ask about is breakfast. I counsel my clients to eat a fat and protein-heavy breakfast as soon as possible after they awaken (no simple carbohydrates, no sugars, as they are digested too rapidly, and produce a blood-sugar spike and rapid dip).

I have had many clients whose anxiety was reduced to subclinical levels merely because they started to sleep on a predictable schedule and eat breakfast.

There are many systems of interaction between brain, body and social world that can get caught in positive feedback loops. Depressed people, for example, can start feeling useless and burdensome, as well as grief-stricken and pained. This makes them withdraw from contact with friends and family. Then the withdrawal makes them more lonesome and isolated, and more likely to feel useless and burdensome. Then they withdraw more. In this manner, depression spirals and amplifies.

People, like lobsters, size each other up, partly in consequence of stance. If you present yourself as defeated, then people will react to you as if you are losing. If you start to straighten up, then people will look at and treat you differently.

To stand up straight with your shoulders back is to accept the terrible responsibility of life, with eyes wide open. It means deciding to voluntarily transform the chaos of potential into the realities of habitable order. It means adopting the burden of self-conscious vulnerability, and accepting the end of the unconscious paradise of childhood, where finitude and mortality are only dimly comprehended. It means willingly undertaking the sacrifices necessary to generate a productive and meaningful reality (it means acting to please God, in the ancient language).

So, attend carefully to your posture. Quit drooping and hunching around. Speak your mind. Put your desires forward, as if you had a right to them—at least the same right as others. Walk tall and gaze forthrightly ahead. Dare to be dangerous. Encourage the serotonin to flow plentifully through the neural pathways desperate for its calming influence.

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

People are better at filling and properly administering prescription medication to their pets than to themselves.

In any case, that which we subjectively experience can be likened much more to a novel or a movie than to a scientific description of physical reality. It is the drama of lived experience—the unique, tragic, personal death of your father, compared to the objective death listed in the hospital records; the pain of your first love; the despair of dashed hopes; the joy attendant upon a child’s success.

the world of experience has primal constituents, as well. These are the necessary elements whose interactions define drama and fiction. One of these is chaos. Another is order. The third (as there are three) is the process that mediates between the two, which appears identical to what modern people call consciousness. It is our eternal subjugation to the first two that makes us doubt the validity of existence—that makes us throw up our hands in despair, and fail to care for ourselves properly. It is proper understanding of the third that allows us the only real way out.

When the ice you're skating on is solid, that's order. When the bottom drops out, and things fall apart, and you plunge through the ice, that's chaos.

Our categories are far older than our species. Our most basic category—as old, in some sense, as the sexual act itself—appears to be that of sex, male and female. We appear to have taken that primordial knowledge of structured, creative opposition and begun to interpret everything through its

Most men do not meet female human standards. It is for this reason that women on dating sites rate 85 percent of men as below average in attractiveness.

the very hemispheric structure of the cortex reflects the fundamental division between novelty (the unknown, or chaos) and routinization (the known)

We eternally inhabit order, surrounded by chaos. We eternally occupy known territory, surrounded by the unknown. We experience meaningful engagement when we mediate appropriately between them.

When life suddenly reveals itself as intense, gripping and meaningful; when time passes and you're so engrossed in what you're doing you don't notice—it is there and then that you are located precisely on the border between order and chaos.

The worst of all possible snakes is the eternal human proclivity for evil. The worst of all possible snakes is psychological, spiritual, personal, internal.

This is the great Freudian Oedipal nightmare. It is far better to render Beings in your care competent than to protect them.

How could the nature of man ever reach its full potential without challenge and danger? How dull and contemptible would we become if there was no longer reason to pay attention?

Dr. Lynn Isbell, professor of anthropology and animal behaviour at the University of California, has suggested that the stunningly acute vision almost uniquely possessed by human beings was an adaptation forced on us tens of millions of years ago by the necessity of detecting and avoiding the terrible danger of snakes, with whom our ancestors...

Unlike us, predators have no comprehension of their fundamental weakness, their fundamental vulnerability, their own subjugation to pain and death. But we know exactly how and where we can be

hurt, and why. That is as good a definition as any of self-consciousness. We are aware of our own defencelessness, finitude and mortality. We can feel pain, and self-disgust, and shame, and horror, and we know it. We know what makes us suffer. We know how dread and pain can be inflicted on us—and that means we know exactly how to inflict it on others. We know how we are naked, and how that nakedness can be exploited—and that means we know how others are naked, and how they can be exploited.

And no one understands the darkness of the individual better than the individual himself. Who, then, when ill, is going to be fully committed to his own care?

If we wish to take care of ourselves properly, we would have to respect ourselves—but we don't, because we are—not least in our own eyes—fallen creatures. If we lived in Truth; if we spoke the Truth—then we could walk with God once again, and respect ourselves, and others, and the world. Then we might treat ourselves like people we cared for. We might strive to set the world straight. We might orient it toward Heaven, where we would want people we cared for to dwell, instead of Hell, where our resentment and hatred would eternally sentence everyone.

There are so many ways that things can fall apart, or fail to work altogether, and it is always wounded people who are holding it together.

To treat yourself as if you were someone you are responsible for helping is, instead, to consider what would be truly good for you. This is not “what you want.” It is also not “what would make you happy.”

You need to consider the future and think, “What might my life look like if I were caring for myself properly?”

You could help direct the world, on its careening trajectory, a bit more toward Heaven and a bit more away from Hell. Once having understood Hell, researched it, so to speak—particularly your own individual Hell—you could decide against going there or creating that. You could aim elsewhere. You could, in fact, devote your life to this.

Rule 3: Make Friends with People Who Want the Best For You

The same thing happens when well-meaning counsellors place a delinquent teen among comparatively civilized peers. The delinquency spreads, not the stability. Down is a lot easier than up.

Assume first that you are doing the easiest thing, and not the most difficult.

Besides, if you buy the story that everything terrible just happened on its own, with no personal responsibility on the part of the victim, you deny that person all agency in the past (and, by implication, in the present and future, as well). In this manner, you strip him or her of all power.

Rogers believed it was impossible to convince someone to change for the better. The desire to improve was, instead, the precondition for progress. I've had court-mandated psychotherapy clients. They did not want my help. They were forced to seek it. It did not work. It was a travesty.

Here's something to consider: If you have a friend whose friendship you wouldn't recommend to your sister, or your father, or your son, why would you have such a friend for yourself?

You should choose people who want things to be better, not worse. It's a good thing, not a selfish thing, to choose people who are good for you. It's appropriate and praiseworthy to associate with people whose lives would be improved if they saw your life improve.

When you dare aspire upward, you reveal the inadequacy of the present and the promise of the future.

Don't think that it is easier to surround yourself with good healthy people than with bad unhealthy people. It's not. A good, healthy person is an ideal. It requires strength and daring to stand up near such a person. Have some humility. Have some courage. Use your judgment, and protect yourself from too-uncritical compassion and pity.

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

No matter how good you are at something, or how you rank your accomplishments, there is someone out there who makes you look incompetent.

In a million years, who's going to know the difference? The proper response to that statement is not, Well, then, everything is meaningless. It's, Any idiot can choose a frame of time within which nothing matters. Talking yourself into irrelevance is not a profound critique of Being. It's a cheap trick of the rational mind.

To begin with, there is not just one game at which to succeed or fail. There are many games and, more specifically, many good games—games that match your talents, involve you productively with other people, and sustain and even improve themselves across time.

It's also unlikely that you're playing only one game. You have a career and friends and family members and personal projects and artistic endeavors and athletic pursuits.

You might object: I should be winning at everything! But winning at everything might only mean that you're not doing anything new or difficult. You might be winning but you're not growing, and growing might be the most important form of winning. Should victory in the present always take precedence over trajectory across time?

What do you do to avoid conflict, necessary though it may be? What are you inclined to lie about, assuming that the truth might be intolerable? What do you fake?

We cannot navigate, without something to aim at and, while we are in this world, we must always

Even when satisfied, temporarily, we remain curious. We live within a framework that defines the present as eternally lacking and the future as eternally better. If we did not see things this way, we would not act at all. We wouldn't even be able to see, because to see we must focus, and to focus we must pick one thing above all else on which to focus.

The future is like the past. But there's a crucial difference. The past is fixed, but the future—it could be better. It could be better, some precise amount—the amount that can be achieved, perhaps, in a day, with some minimal engagement.

Perhaps happiness is always to be found in the journey uphill, and not in the fleeting sense of satisfaction awaiting at the next peak.

"What could I say to someone else—my friend, my brother, my boss, my assistant—that would set things a bit more right between us tomorrow? What bit of chaos might I eradicate at home, on my desk, in my kitchen, tonight, so that the stage could be set for a better play? What snakes might I banish from my closet—and my mind?"

"What could I do, that I would do, that would accomplish that, and what small thing would I like as a reward?" Then you do what you have decided to do, even if you do it badly. Then you give yourself that damn coffee, in triumph. Maybe you feel a bit stupid about it, but you do it anyway. And you do the same thing tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. And, with each day, your baseline of comparison gets a little higher, and that's magic. That's compound interest.

There is nothing magical here—or nothing more than the already-present magic of consciousness. We only see what we aim at. The rest of the world (and that's most of it) is hidden. If we start aiming at something different—something like "I want my life to be better"—our minds will start presenting us with new information, derived from the previously hidden world, to aid us in that pursuit.

Faith is not the childish belief in magic. That is ignorance or even willful blindness. It is instead the realization that the tragic irrationalities of life must be counterbalanced by an equally irrational commitment to the essential goodness of Being. It is simultaneously the will to dare set your sights at the unachievable, and to sacrifice everything, including (and most importantly) your life. You realize that you have, literally, nothing better to do. But how can you do all this?—assuming you are foolish enough to try.

Pay attention. Focus on your surroundings, physical and psychological. Notice something that bothers you, that concerns you, that will not let you be, which you could fix, that you would fix. You can find such somethings by asking yourself (as if you genuinely want to know) three questions: "What is it that is bothering me?" "Is that something I could fix?" and "Would I

actually be willing to fix it?" If you find that the answer is "no," to any or all of the questions, then look elsewhere. Aim lower. Search until you find something that bothers you, that you could fix, that you would fix, and then fix it. That might be enough for the day.

"What could I do, that I would do, to make Life a little better?"

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

Was it really a good thing, for example, to so dramatically liberalize the divorce laws in the 1960s? It's not clear to me that the children whose lives were destabilized by the hypothetical freedom this attempt at liberation introduced would say so. Horror and terror lurk behind the walls provided so wisely by our ancestors. We tear them down at our peril. We skate, unconsciously, on thin ice, with deep, cold waters below, where unimaginable monsters lurk.

(People often get basic psychological questions backwards. Why do people take drugs? Not a mystery. It's why they don't take them all the time that's the mystery. Why do people suffer from anxiety? That's not a mystery. How is that people can ever be calm? There's the mystery. We're breakable and mortal. A million things can go wrong, in a million ways. We should be terrified out of our skulls at every second. But we're not. The same can be said for depression, laziness and criminality.)

Two-year-olds, statistically speaking, are the most violent of people. They kick, hit and bite, and they steal the property of others. They do so to explore, to express outrage and frustration, and to gratify their impulsive desires. More importantly, for our purposes, they do so to discover the true limits of permissible behaviour. How else are they ever going to puzzle out what is acceptable? Infants are like blind people, searching for a wall. They have to push forward, and test, to see where the actual boundaries lie (and those are too-seldom where they are said to be).

Kids do this frequently. Scared parents think that a crying child is always sad or hurt. This is simply not true. Anger is one of the most common reasons for crying. Careful analysis of the musculature patterns of crying children has confirmed this. Anger-crying and fear-or-sadness crying do not look the same. They also don't sound the same, and can be distinguished with careful attention. Anger-crying is often an act of dominance, and should be dealt with as such.

"How was the kid?" his father asked me when he got home, much later that night. "Good," I said. "No problem at all. He's asleep right now." "Did he get up?" said his father. "No," I said. "He slept the whole time." Dad looked at me. He wanted to know. But he didn't ask. And I didn't tell.

You can teach virtually anyone anything with such an approach. First, figure out what you want. Then, watch the people around you like a hawk. Finally, whenever you see anything a bit more

like what you want, swoop in (hawk, remember) and deliver a reward. Your daughter has been very reserved since she became a teenager. You wish she would talk more. That's the target: more communicative daughter. One morning, over breakfast, she shares an anecdote about school. That's an excellent time to pay attention. That's the reward. Stop texting and listen. Unless you don't want her to tell you anything ever again.

Skinner, however, was a realist. He noted that use of reward was very difficult: the observer had to attend patiently until the target spontaneously manifested the desired behaviour, and then reinforce. This required a lot of time, and a lot of waiting, and that's a problem.

However, children would not have such a lengthy period of natural development, prior to maturity, if their behaviour did not have to be shaped.

Given this, the fundamental moral question is not how to shelter children completely from misadventure and failure, so they never experience any fear or pain, but how to maximize their learning so that useful knowledge may be gained with minimal cost.

If a child has not been taught to behave properly by the age of four, it will forever be difficult for him or her to make friends. The research literature is quite clear on this.

So now we have two general principles of discipline. The first: limit the rules. The second: Use the least force necessary to enforce those rules.

So here are a few practical hints: time out can be an extremely effective form of punishment, particularly if the misbehaving child is welcome as soon as he controls his temper. An angry child should sit by himself until he calms down. Then he should be allowed to return to normal life. That means the child wins—instead of his anger.

If your child is the kind of determined varmint who simply runs away, laughing, when placed on the steps or in his room, physical restraint might have to be added to the time out routine. A child can be held carefully but firmly by the upper arms, until he or she stops squirming and pays attention.

Here's a fourth principle, one that is more particularly psychological: parents should understand their own capacity to be harsh, vengeful, arrogant, resentful, angry and deceitful.

People are aggressive and selfish, as well as kind and thoughtful. For this reason, no adult human being—no hierarchical, predatory ape—can truly tolerate being dominated by an upstart child. Revenge will come. Ten minutes after a pair of all-too-nice-and-patient parents have failed to prevent a public tantrum at the local supermarket, they will pay their toddler back with the cold shoulder when he runs up, excited, to show mom and dad his newest accomplishment.

Here's a fifth and final and most general principle. Parents have a duty to act as proxies for the real world—merciful proxies, caring proxies—but proxies, nonetheless. This obligation supersedes any responsibility to ensure happiness, foster creativity, or boost self-esteem. It is the primary duty of parents to make their children socially desirable.

Rule 6: Set Your House in Perfect Order Before You Criticize the World

Many, perhaps even most, of the adults who abuse children were abused themselves as children. However, the majority of people who were abused as children do not abuse their own children.

But success makes us complacent. We forget to pay attention. We take what we have for granted. We turn a blind eye. We fail to notice that things are changing, or that corruption is taking root. And everything falls apart. Is that the fault of reality—of God? Or do things fall apart because we have not paid sufficient attention?

A hurricane is an act of God. But failure to prepare, when the necessity for preparation is well known—that's sin. That's failure to hit the mark. And the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Have you cleaned up your life? If the answer is no, here's something to try: Start to stop doing what you know to be wrong. Start stopping today. Don't waste time questioning how you know that what you're doing is wrong, if you are certain that it is.

Don't reorganize the state until you have ordered your own experience. Have some humility. If you cannot bring peace to your household, how dare you try to rule a city?

Rule 7: Pursue What is Meaningful (Not What is Expedient)

To share does not mean to give away something you value, and get nothing back. That is instead only what every child who refuses to share fears it means. To share means, properly, to initiate the process of trade. A child who can't share—who can't trade—can't have any friends, because having friends is a form of trade.

People watched the successful succeed and the unsuccessful fail for thousands and thousands of years. We thought it over, and drew a conclusion: The successful among us delay gratification. The successful among us bargain with the future. A great idea begins to emerge, taking ever-more-clearly-articulated form, in ever more-clearly-articulated stories: What's the difference between the successful and the unsuccessful? The successful sacrifice.

If the world you are seeing is not the world you want, therefore, it's time to examine your values. It's time to rid yourself of your current presuppositions. It's time to let go. It might even be time to sacrifice what you love best, so that you can become who you might become, instead of staying who you are.

Thus, the person who wishes to alleviate suffering—who wishes to rectify the flaws in Being; who wants to bring about the best of

all possible futures; who wants to create Heaven on Earth—will make the greatest of sacrifices, of self and child, of everything that is loved, to live a life aimed at the Good. He will forego expediency. He will pursue the path of ultimate meaning. And he will in that manner bring salvation to the ever-desperate world.

"No tree can grow to Heaven," adds the ever-terrifying Carl Gustav Jung, psychoanalyst extraordinaire, "unless its roots reach down to hell."

Christ responds to the first temptation by saying, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." What does this answer mean? It means that even under conditions of extreme privation, there are more important things than food. To put it another way: Bread is of little use to the man who has betrayed his soul, even if he is currently

The society produced by Christianity was far less barbaric than the pagan—even the Roman—ones it replaced. Christian society at least recognized that feeding slaves to ravenous lions for the entertainment of the populace was wrong, even if many barbaric practices still existed. It objected to infanticide, to prostitution, and to the principle that might means right. It insisted that women were as valuable as men (even though we are still working out how to manifest that insistence politically). It demanded that even a society's enemies be regarded as human. Finally, it separated church from state, so that all-too-human emperors could no longer claim the veneration due to gods.

People stricken with poverty don't care about carbon dioxide. It's not precisely that CO2 levels are irrelevant. It's that they're irrelevant when you're working yourself to death, starving, scraping a bare living from the stony, unyielding, thorn-and-thistle-infested ground.

Even when the modern atheists opposed to Christianity belittle fundamentalists for insisting, for example, that the creation account in Genesis is objectively true, they are using their sense of truth, highly developed over the centuries of Christian culture, to engage in such argumentation.

Besides, the socialists were more intrinsically capitalist than the capitalists. They believed just as strongly in money. They just thought that if different people had the money, the problems plaguing humanity would vanish.

Each human being understands, a priori, perhaps not what is good, but certainly what is not. And if there is something that is not good, then there is something that is good. If the worst sin is the torment of others, merely for the sake of the suffering produced—then the good is whatever is diametrically opposed to that. The good is whatever stops such things from happening.

It was from this that I drew my fundamental moral conclusions. Aim up. Pay attention. Fix what you can fix. Don't be arrogant in your knowledge. Strive for humility, because totalitarian pride manifests itself in intolerance, oppression, torture and death. Become aware of your own insufficiency—your cowardice,

malevolence, resentment and hatred. Consider the murderousness of your own spirit before you dare accuse others, and before you attempt to repair the fabric of the world. Maybe it's not the world that's at fault. Maybe it's you. You've failed to make the mark. You've missed the target. You've fallen short of the glory of God. You've sinned. And all of that is your contribution to the insufficiency and evil of the world. And, above all, don't lie. Don't lie about anything, ever. Lying leads to Hell. It was the great and the small lies of the Nazi and Communist states that produced the deaths of millions of people.

You may come to ask yourself, "What should I do today?" in a manner that means "How could I use my time to make things better, instead of worse?"

To have meaning in your life is better than to have what you want, because you may neither know what you want, nor what you truly need. Meaning is something that comes upon you, of its own accord. You can set up the preconditions, you can follow meaning, when it manifests itself, but you cannot simply produce it, as an act of will.

What is expedient works only for the moment. It's immediate, impulsive and limited. What is meaningful, by contrast, is the organization of what would otherwise merely be expedient into a symphony of Being.

Rule 8: Tell the Truth, or at least Don't Lie

I soon came to realize that almost everything I said was untrue. I had motives for saying these things: I wanted to win arguments and gain status and impress people and get what I wanted. I was using language to bend and twist the world into delivering what I thought was necessary. But I was a fake. Realizing this, I started to practise only saying things that the internal voice would not object to. I started to practise telling the truth—or, at least, not lying. I soon learned that such a skill came in very handy when I didn't know what to do. What should you do, when you don't know what to do? Tell the truth.

I have seen people define their utopia and then bend their lives into knots trying to make it reality. A left-leaning student adopts a trendy, anti-authority stance and spends the next twenty years working resentfully to topple the windmills of his imagination.

However, researchers have recently discovered that new genes in the central nervous system turn themselves on when an organism is placed (or places itself) in a new situation. These genes code for new proteins. These proteins are the building blocks for new structures in the brain. This means that a lot of you is still nascent, in the most physical of senses, and will not be called forth by stasis. You have to say something, go somewhere and do things to get turned on. And, if not...you remain incomplete, and life is too hard for anyone incomplete.

Only the most cynical, hopeless philosophy insists that reality could be improved through falsification.

To accept the truth means to sacrifice—and if you have rejected the truth for a long time, then you've run up a dangerously large sacrificial debt. Forest fires burn out deadwood and return trapped elements to the soil. Sometimes, however, fires are suppressed, artificially. That does not stop the deadwood from accumulating. Sooner or later, a fire will start. When it does, it will burn so hot that everything will be destroyed—even the soil in which the forest grows.

We must make decisions, here and now, even though the best means and the best goals can never be discerned with certainty. An aim, an ambition, provides the structure necessary for action. An aim provides a destination, a point of contrast against the present, and a framework, within which all things can be evaluated. An aim defines progress and makes such progress exciting. An aim reduces anxiety, because if you have no aim everything can mean anything or nothing, and neither of those two options makes for a tranquil spirit. Thus, we have to think, and plan, and limit, and posit, in order to live at all.

You are by no means only what you already know. You are also all that which you could know, if you only would. Thus, you should never sacrifice what you could be for what you are. You should never give up the better that resides within for the security you already have—and certainly not when you have already caught a glimpse, an undeniable glimpse, of something beyond.

Everyone needs a concrete, specific goal—an ambition, and a purpose—to limit chaos and make intelligible sense of his or her life. But all such concrete goals can and should be subordinated to what might be considered a meta-goal, which is a way of approaching and formulating goals themselves. The meta-goal could be "live in truth." This means, "Act diligently towards some well-articulated, defined and temporary end. Make your criteria for failure and success timely and clear, at least for yourself (and even better if others can understand what you are doing and evaluate it with you). While doing so, however, allow the world and your spirit to unfold as they will, while you act out and articulate the truth." This is both pragmatic ambition and the most courageous of faiths.

If your life is not what it could be, try telling the truth. If you cling desperately to an ideology, or wallow in nihilism, try telling the truth. If you feel weak and rejected, and desperate, and confused, try telling the truth. In Paradise, everyone speaks the truth. That is what makes it Paradise. Tell the truth. Or, at least, don't lie.

Rule 9: Assume that the Person You Are Listening to Might Know Something You Don't

Memory is not a description of the objective past. Memory is a tool. Memory is the past's guide to the future. If you remember that something bad happened, and you can figure out why, then you can try to avoid that bad thing happening again. That's the purpose of memory. It's not "to remember the past." It's to stop the same damn thing from happening over and over.

Carl Rogers, one of the twentieth century's great psychotherapists, knew something about listening. He wrote, "The great majority of us cannot listen; we find ourselves compelled to evaluate, because listening is too dangerous. The first requirement is courage, and we do not always have

If you listen, instead, without premature judgment, people will generally tell you everything they are thinking—and with very little deceit. People will tell you the most amazing, absurd, interesting things. Very few of your conversations will be boring. (You can in fact tell whether or not you are actually listening in this manner. If the conversation is boring, you probably aren't.)

Rule 10: Be Precise in Your Speech

When things break down, what has been ignored rushes in. When things are no longer specified, with precision, the walls crumble, and chaos makes its presence known. When we've been careless, and let things slide, what we have refused to attend to gathers itself up, adopts a serpentine form, and strikes—often at the worst possible moment. It is then that we see what focused intent, precision of aim and careful attention protects us from.

Chaos emerges in a household, bit by bit. Mutual unhappiness and resentment pile up. Everything untidy is swept under the rug, where the dragon feasts on the crumbs. But no one says anything, as the shared society and negotiated order of the household reveals itself as inadequate, or disintegrates, in the face of the unexpected and threatening. Everybody whistles in the dark, instead.

Something is out there in the woods. You know that with certainty. But often it's only a squirrel. If you refuse to look, however, then it's a dragon, and you're no knight: you're a mouse confronting a lion; a rabbit, paralyzed by the gaze of a wolf. And I am not saying that it's always a squirrel. Often it's something truly terrible. But even what is terrible in actuality often pales in significance compared to what is terrible in imagination.

Confront the chaos of Being. Take aim against a sea of troubles. Specify your destination, and chart your course. Admit to what you want. Tell those around you who you are. Narrow, and gaze attentively, and move forward, forthrightly. Be precise in your speech.

Rule 11: Do Not Bother Children when they are Skateboarding

Of course it was dangerous. Danger was the point. They wanted to triumph over danger. They would have been safer in protective equipment, but that would have ruined it. They weren't trying to be safe. They were trying to become competent—and it's competence that makes people as safe as they can truly be.

When untrammelled—and encouraged—we prefer to live on the edge. There, we can still be both confident in our experience and confronting the chaos that helps us develop. We're hard-wired, for that reason, to enjoy risk (some of us more than others). We feel invigorated and excited when we work to optimize our future

performance, while playing in the present. Otherwise we lumber around, sloth-like, unconscious, unformed and careless. Overprotected, we will fail when something dangerous, unexpected and full of opportunity suddenly makes its appearance, as it inevitably will.

I believe it was Jung who developed the most surgically wicked of psychoanalytic dicta: if you cannot understand why someone did something, look at the consequences—and infer the motivation.

Girls can win by winning in their own hierarchy—by being good at what girls value, as girls. They can add to this victory by winning in the boys' hierarchy. Boys, however, can only win by winning in the male hierarchy. They will lose status, among girls and boys, by being good at what girls value. It costs them in reputation among the boys, and in attractiveness among the girls.

From 1997 to 2012, according to the Pew Research Centre, 180 the number of women aged 18 to 34 who said that a successful marriage is one of the most important things in life rose from 28 to 37 percent (an increase of more than 30 percent). The number of young men who said the same thing declined 15 percent over the same period (from 35 to 29 percent).

Consider this, as well, in regard to oppression: any hierarchy creates winners and losers. The winners are, of course, more likely to justify the hierarchy and the losers to criticize it. But (1) the collective pursuit of any valued goal produces a hierarchy (as some will be better and some worse at that pursuit not matter what it is) and (2) it is the pursuit of goals that in large part lends life its sustaining meaning.

Power is a fundamental motivational force ("a," not "the"). People compete to rise to the top, and they care where they are in dominance hierarchies. But (and this is where you separate the metaphorical boys from the men, philosophically) the fact that power plays a role in human motivation does not mean that it plays the only role, or even the primary role. Likewise, the fact that we can never know everything does make all our observations and utterances dependent on taking some things into account and leaving other things out (as we discussed extensively in Rule 10). That does not justify the claim that everything is interpretation, or that categorization is just exclusion. Beware of single cause interpretations—and beware the people who purvey them.

If radical right-wingers were receiving state funding for political operations disguised as university courses, as the radical left-wingers clearly are, the uproar from progressives across North America would be deafening.

In societies that are well-functioning—not in comparison to a hypothetical utopia, but contrasted with other existing or historical cultures—competence, not power, is a prime determiner of status. Competence. Ability. Skill. Not power. This is obvious both anecdotally and factually. No one with brain cancer is equity-minded enough to refuse the service of the surgeon with the best education, the best reputation and, perhaps, the highest

earnings. Furthermore, the most valid personality trait predictors of long-term success in Western countries are intelligence (as measured with cognitive ability or IQ tests) and conscientiousness (a trait characterized by industriousness and orderliness).

Gender is constructed, but an individual who desires gender re-assignment surgery is to be unarguably considered a man trapped in a woman's body (or vice versa). The fact that both of these cannot logically be true, simultaneously, is just ignored (or rationalized away with another appalling post-modern claim: that logic itself—along with the techniques of science—is merely part of the oppressive patriarchal system).

Here's the fundamental problem: group identity can be fractionated right down to the level of the individual. That sentence should be written in capital letters. Every person is unique—and not just in a trivial manner: importantly, significantly, meaningfully unique. Group membership cannot capture that variability. Period.

It's a good idea to tell the person you are confronting exactly what you would like them to do instead of what they have done or currently are doing. You might think, "if they loved me, they would know what to do." That's the voice of resentment. Assume ignorance before malevolence. No one has a direct pipeline to your wants and needs—not even you.

For a woman to become complete, such stories claim, she must form a relationship with masculine consciousness and stand up to the terrible world (which sometimes manifests itself, primarily, in the form of her too-present mother). An actual man can help her do that, to some degree, but it is better for everyone concerned when no one is too dependent.

Men enforce a code of behaviour on each other, when working together. Do your work. Pull your weight. Stay awake and pay attention. Don't whine or be touchy. Stand up for your friends. Don't suck up and don't snitch. Don't be a slave to stupid rules. Don't, in the immortal words of Arnold Schwarzenegger, be a girlie man. Don't be dependent. At all. Ever. Period. The harassment that is part of acceptance on a working crew is a test: are you tough, entertaining, competent and reliable? If not, go away. Simple as that. We don't need to feel sorry for you. We don't want to put up with your narcissism, and we don't want to do your work.

That ad is famous for a reason. It summarizes human sexual psychology in seven straightforward panels. The too-weak young man is embarrassed and self-conscious, as he should be. What good is he? He gets put down by other men and, worse, by desirable women. Instead of drowning in resentment, and skulking off to his basement to play video games in his underwear, covered with Cheetos dust, he presents himself with what Alfred Adler, Freud's most practical colleague, called a "compensatory fantasy." The goal of such a fantasy is not so much wish-fulfillment, as illumination of a genuine path forward. Mac takes serious note of his scarecrow-like build and decides that he should develop a stronger body. More importantly, he puts his plan into

action. He identifies with the part of himself that could transcend his current state, and becomes the hero of his own adventure. He goes back to the beach, and punches the bully in the nose. Mac wins. So does his eventual girlfriend. So does everybody else.

If they're healthy, women don't want boys. They want men. They want someone to contend with; someone to grapple with. If they're tough, they want someone tougher. If they're smart, they want someone smarter. They desire someone who brings to the table something they can't already provide. This often makes it hard for tough, smart, attractive women to find mates: there just aren't that many men around who can outclass them enough to be considered desirable (who are higher, as one research publication put it, in "income, education, self-confidence, intelligence, dominance and social position").

become men is, therefore, no more friend to woman than it is to man. It will object, just as vociferously and self-righteously ("you can't do it, it's too dangerous") when little girls try to stand on their own two feet. It negates consciousness. It's antihuman, desirous of failure, jealous, resentful and destructive. No one truly on the side of humanity would ally him or herself with such a thing. No one aiming at moving up would allow him or herself to become possessed by such a thing. And if you think tough men are dangerous, wait until you see what weak men are capable of. Leave children alone when they are skateboarding.

Rule 12: Pet a Cat When You Encounter One on the Street

By the 1980s, Superman was suffering from terminal *deus ex machina*—a Latin term meaning "god from a machine." The term described the rescue of the imperilled hero in ancient Greek and Roman plays by the sudden and miraculous appearance of an all-powerful god.

Perhaps you might start by noticing this: when you love someone, it's not despite their limitations. It's because of their limitations.

Set aside some time to talk and to think about the illness or other crisis and how it should be managed every day. Do not talk or think about it otherwise. If you do not limit its effect, you will become exhausted, and everything will spiral into the ground. This is not helpful. Conserve your strength. You're in a war, not a battle, and a war is composed of many battles. You must stay functional through all of them. When worries associated with the crisis arise at other times, remind yourself that you will think them through, during the scheduled period.

And maybe when you are going for a walk and your head is spinning a cat will show up and if you pay attention to it then you will get a reminder for just fifteen seconds that the wonder of Being might make up for the ineradicable suffering that accompanies it. Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street.

Coda

Perhaps it's not reasonable to ask God to break the rules of physics every time we fall by the wayside or make a serious error.

Perhaps, in such times, you can't put the cart before the horse and simply wish for your problem to be solved in some magical manner. Perhaps you could ask, instead, what you might have to do right now to increase your resolve, buttress your character, and find the strength to go on. Perhaps you could instead ask to see the truth.

Alone, trying to calm down, we would each ask ourselves the same single question: What had we each done to contribute to the situation we were arguing about? However small, however distant...we had each made some error. Then we would reunite, and share the results of our questioning: Here's how I was wrong....

The next question ended the first set: What shall I do with my life? Aim for Paradise, and concentrate on today.

Consider, as well, that you may be blocked in your progress not because you lack opportunity, but because you have been too arrogant to make full use of what already lies in front of you. That's Rule 6 (Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world).

What shall I do in the next dire moment? Focus my attention on the next right move. The flood is coming. The flood is always coming. The apocalypse is always upon us. That's why the story of Noah is archetypal. Things fall apart—we stressed that in the discussion surrounding Rule 10 (Be precise in your speech)—and the centre cannot hold. When everything has become chaotic and uncertain, all that remains to guide you might be the character you constructed, previously, by aiming up and concentrating on the moment at hand. If you have failed in that, you will fail in the moment of crisis, and then God help you.