

Angela Nagle, Kill All Normies

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome back. It's been some time since I last did so, so I thought I'd review a book today. Today's book is Angela Nagle, Kill All Normies, Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt Right.

And within this book, she's discussing the rise of a particular sort of culture online, very cynical, reactive, a culture of irony, parody, mocking, trolling, and a particular sort of detached humour.

So she gives the example of the movement from Kony 2012, that movement that was seeking to displace and overturn a warlord in Africa, to Harambe and the response to the guerrilla that was shot after having the child.

This is something that she sees rising in response, in part, to a humorous mainstream virtue signalling and PC policing culture. So a culture that is very much about closing down different toxic or problematic movements.

And this movement that has risen in response to it, it's very hard to discern what is real and sincere and what has merely been done for trolling purposes or for the lulls. Interpretation is constantly frustrated by the cynical irony and detachment.

[1 : 1 7] And so it's very difficult to understand to what extent, for instance, people genuinely hold Nazi sentiments or to what extent they're just saying things to provoke others. Now, she sees some of the origins of this movement in the celebration of leaderless digital movements.

So things like Anonymous. A few years ago, you'd have a lot of news about Anonymous, and Anonymous was seen to be this primarily left libertarian movement.

And you'd have the symbol of the Guy Fawkes mask. And you still have that being worn today. But it's a symbol that she describes as having politically fungible sensibilities.

And so it can go in any direction. It can play for the right. It can play for the left. You just do not know what side it's on. You're advocating for a particular sort of culture.

But that culture can play in surprising ways. So she talks about the inconsistency and incoherence of Anonymous as a movement, where it would stand for different sorts of things.

[2 : 2 3] And it wasn't entirely clear what side it fell down on. It was a chaotic movement and diffuse. And this larger movement contains everything from Pepe Memesters to things like Gamer Gators to characters like Milo Yiannopoulos, pickup artists, men's rights activists, 4Channers, and a lot of other things like this.

And one of the common themes that she sees are a sense of anti-political correctness and aggrieved masculinity. And these are very much things that express themselves in an especially misogynistic and anti-feminist tendency.

So you see, for instance, Gamer Gators originally arising around ethics in game journalism and fighting feminist challenges to their culture.

People like Anita Sarkeesian, characters like that who were pointing out problematic aspects of gaming culture and the games that maintained images of women that were inappropriate and things like that.

She discusses in one of the more interesting sections, a celebration of transgression and the aesthetics of the counterculture that traditionally is associated with the left.

[3 : 41] So we think about transgression and we think about the counterculture and we tend to associate that with 60s, 70s onwards. The left developing a particular sort of aesthetic and movement that pushes against the mainstream and celebrates a subculture and opposition to norms and that sort of thing and breaks taboos.

But, as she points out, there is absolutely no reason why that cannot be appropriated by the right and that this is just what has happened. So the taboo breaking culture of 4chan and other movements, they're highly amoral, they're deeply hostile to women and minorities, and they reject traditional norms upheld by conservatives and Christians.

So a good example of this is a character like Milo Yiannopoulos. And in this respect, the book does seem a bit dated. Milo's star has considerably fallen. But he's a figure who represents libertinism, individualism, bourgeois bohemianism, postmodernism, irony and ultimately nihilism.

That's her description. And he's very much someone who celebrates misogyny for laughs and anti-feminism for laughs, drugs, sexuality, these sorts of things.

That's the sort of character he is. She writes, The rise of Milo, Trump and the alt-right are not evidence of the return of the conservatism, but instead of the absolute hegemony of the culture of non-conformism, self-expression, transgression and irreverence for its own sake.

[5 : 11] An aesthetic that suits those who believe in nothing but the liberation of the individual and the id, whether they're on the left or the right. The principle-free idea of counterculture did not go away.

It has just become the style of the new right. She describes an alt-right movement as the bridge between the more obscure alt-right movement and the mainstream support of Trump.

And so this new alt-right movement, which someone like Milo would be an example of, Breitbart, things like that. These were very adept at using tactics and methods of cultural destabilization and changing of cultural norms and consensus in ways that were traditionally associated with the left.

And with figures like, for instance, Saul Alinsky and others, they created and mobilized a vast and very diffuse internet culture. So everything from political incorrect boards on 4chan to right-wing blogs that would be circulated on Facebook links and lots of YouTube bloggers, sites like Breitbart, projects like the Rebel Media.

And these proved a strategic match both for liberal and left-wing equivalents and also for what we might think of as the lumbering dinosaurs of the old media.

[6 : 33] If you look at the old media, they have not been successful in outwitting this. They're just not as adept in this sort of culture. They don't have the cool and the hip of the subculture that the right has in these sorts of quarters.

She discusses the way that politics has increasingly been reduced to a spectacle of a culture war and that the presidential race between Hillary and Trump is a great example of this.

It's a struggle between traditional conservative and neoconservative politics as well, a struggle against that. So the old right is not just a return of the old right sorts of politics.

It's a new transgressive right that's associated with a particular attack upon traditional conservatives, calling them cuck-servatives and things like that, that they're those who have rolled over and just given in to the left and its demands.

And they fail to stand up for country. They fail to stand up for their principles. They fail to stand up for their movement. And the new right wing, this transgressive right wing, is highly literate in modern media, digital culture and the dynamics of counterculture.

[7 : 52] It's not a movement that is just depending upon old methods. They're highly innovative and they're people who are very organized and able to connect in new ways.

And they understand their opponents a great deal better than their opponents understand them. So this alt-right movement has developed in concert and in direct reaction against a movement on the other side.

So this is one of the areas where I'm impressed with Nagel's account, that she recognizes how these two things interplay. That it's not just a matter of this alt-right movement is arising independently.

No, these two movements are arising in concert with each other. And on the left you have identity politics culture that celebrated anti-male, anti-white, anti-straight and anti-cis rhetoric.

And it's focused upon ever more obscure, boutique and bespoke identities. And it talks about intersectionality, safe spaces, trigger warnings and ever more subtle forms of oppression.

[9 : 03] And she talks about this as a culture of oppression. And she talks about this as a culture of suffering, weakness, self-flagellation, vulnerability and these sorts of things. And it's no more, it's no less important for understanding the current situation than its right wing equivalent.

And she observes just how vicious and vindictive this culture is. Her quote of Mark Fisher's understanding of the movement is particularly helpful.

She writes, The strangest feature of this online call-out culture was this mixture of performative vulnerability, self-righteous wokeness and bullying.

The online dynamics of this call-out culture were brilliantly described by Fisher, Mark Fisher, as driven by a priest's desire to excommunicate and condemn, an academic pedant's desire to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a hipster's desire to be one of the in-crowd.

I would add to this that the key driving force behind it is about creating scarcity in an environment in which virtue is the currency that can make or break the career or social success of an online user in this milieu, the counterforce of which was the anonymous underworld from which the right wing trolling cultures emerged.

[10 : 19] And so when virtue is the currency, there's a constant need to create scarcity. And this occurs through call-outs and purging and an increasing identity-focused bullying.

So if you're white, if you're privileged in some sense, if you're male, you can be purged more or less for that reason, or you have to adopt a very apologetic and supplicatory tone.

And so people on the mainstream left largely gave in to this new form of left-wing identity politics culture. They largely failed to stand up to it. They couldn't easily without losing credibility.

But people on the right, in some quarters, stood up against it. And figures like Milo gleefully assumed the part of provocateurs. They wanted to needle this movement, to cause it to react and take delight in the meme potential, the viral potential of videos and other things like that, that show the left overreacting and making fools of themselves.

You can think of Trigglypuff and things like that. Those sorts of images of an overweight woman shrieking and jiggling in rage. And that sort of thing was the meat and drink of this movement on the right, taking delight in bringing down and ridiculing the ridiculousness of the left and how weak, oversensitive and all these other things it was.

[11 : 51] And there's a sense that weakness itself was the blood in the water that attracted this movement. That when they see this extreme sensitivity, it just triggers them.

That they find it intolerable. They find it distasteful and repulsive. And they want to push back against it. And this is a crucial part, she believes, in the background for the election of Trump.

I think this is important. That there's something about the shamelessness of Trump that renders him rather immune to the social justice culture of the left. And also his success in the election is a radical triggering of the left.

And there's a delight in actually seeing them overreact to this ultimate injustice. And she observes that the movements that she's describing cluster in many respects around the orbit of the manosphere, as it's been called.

So you have pick-up artists, you have men's rights activists, you have things like the MGTOW movement, men going their own way, as it's called, and seeking to a male separatist movement.

[12 : 59] And they're also incels, involuntary celibates. Now the left has their own form of incels where they talk about transgender persons that can't get anyone to sleep with them.

But these are incels who tend to be younger men who can't find romantic success. And in their various guises, these typically attacked feminism.

They attacked each other a lot. So pick-up artists and men's rights activists typically will not like MGTOW and incel types. But they're all united in their attack against feminism.

And often in their attack upon women more generally. Despite the claims concerning Trump and populism, Nagle observes that this sort of group of the vanguard that he has online in the alt-light has a subcultural snobbishness towards mass culture.

So the idea that Trump is a popular movement is kind of missing the point, she argues. Trolling and meme culture both require intense subcultural literacy to navigate and gain cultural capital.

[14 : 05] And they're very merciless in keeping out outsiders and rooting out anyone who's a supposed interloper. And there's a Nietzschean character to this, something that you see in a film like Fight Club.

And it sets itself against lesser conformist persons who haven't been so-called red-pilled. And there's a fight back against what are conceived of as the emasculating conditions of modern life.

Now I think Nagle probably misses part of what's going on here. The issue with Trump was not just mass culture and populism in that sense, but was a pushback against certain elites.

And the subculture of this online group really ties in with the popular reaction against the elite with their virtue signalling and their PC policing and other things like that, which were very much about maintaining virtue within this very closely defined elite group, highly educated people who have the right form of woke left-wing politics.

It was a pushing back against that. And in that respect, the popular electorate and the subcultural group have a lot in common. Within these cultures, girls and women in particular can be ruthlessly removed.

[15 : 32] They can be seen to represent, she describes women as representing, the inauthenticity and conformism of mainstream culture with its restrictive demands and controls that they place upon people that everyone has to be nice and conformist.

They have to play by the rules, that sort of thing. And women, as they enter into these online cultures that typically are male-dominated, they are seen to bring with them all those controls and demands.

And in actual fact, that's often what happens. But she observes the way that this has been played out in previous movements. So particularly interesting is her discussion of the movement of new atheism that anticipated many of these developments, with its own turn towards the right and a male-focused culture in its internal struggles with feminists.

So it becomes increasingly, the people who were once involved in the new atheist movement are increasingly more vigorously involved in anti-social justice movements and struggles with feminists who are seeking to disrupt its young male culture and also pushing back against some of its key values.

And she concludes by observing that this culture on the right has grown increasingly nasty and antagonistic towards the norms and morality of society.

[16 : 54] And she concludes by castigating the left for its failure to stand up against this sort of thing and for the way in which it has fed it by fostering and celebrating a culture of transgression and other things like that.

Writing about Milo at the very concluding paragraphs, she observes, his tour painfully exposed the deep intellectual rot in contemporary cultural progressivism and it found itself completely unable to deal with the challenge coming from the right.

The problem with the contemporary style of Tumblr liberalism and a purely identitarian self-oriented progressivism that fomented in online subcultures and moved on to college campuses is that the very idea of winning people over through ideas now seem to anguish, offend and enrage this tragically stupefied shadow of the great movements of the left like the one that began on campuses like Berkeley in 1964.

Milo may be vanquished but not through a battle of ideas. The online culture wars of recent years have become ugly beyond anything we could have possibly imagined and it doesn't look like there is any easy way out of the mess that has been created.

Suddenly, how far away the utopian internet-centric days of the leaderless digital revolution now seem when progressive rejoice that the disgust had become a network and burst suddenly into real life.

[18 : 20] Now one is almost more inclined to hope that the online world can contain rather than further enable the festering undergrowth of dehumanising reactionary online politics now edging closer to the mainstream but unthinkable in the public arena.

just a few short years ago. Now I've found this book very helpful. It's a short book. It's only about 120 pages long so it doesn't get into as much depth as it could get into in a number of these issues.

There were a number of ways I was impressed with it. I thought it was very even-handed. I thought I was expecting something a lot more one-sided but I thought it gave a fair assessment of the situation.

I thought it was generally accurate in its analysis. I think it identified movements and connections that many people failed to recognise. I think it had its finger on some of the underlying dynamics.

There were other ways in which I thought it could be improved and developed. I thought particularly there needed to be more direct interaction with people who are involved in this subculture. What are they finding out of it?

[19 : 29] I think there are a lot of young men particularly who find a lot of things that are important to them in this subculture that they don't find elsewhere. The question is why and what?

That is something that I don't think that she fully addressed or explored. There needs to be a lot more said about the bridge between the alt-right and the online subculture she describes in the mainstream.

She focuses a bit too much upon this alt-right movement and other things like that that describes part of the dynamics but a lot of it is a lot less focused and its resistance to the movements on the left is a lot more diffuse and it's not as conceptually or ideologically integrated as she might suggest.

I think she puts too much emphasis upon the spirit of the transgressive online right for the rise of Trump. That's part of it but there's a lot more going on there.

They are an important factor but they're far from the only one. I think on the left there's a lot of people who are inclined to trace the majority of Trump's support down to its uglier roots and I just don't think that's accurate.

[20 : 47] Many Christians for instance I think saw in Trump a force to fight against forces that were deeply hostile to them and their institutions that would happily destroy them given the chance.

And so these people on the online right they're far from the only ones who have a deep vested interest in opposing the righting social justice warrior virtue signaling culture that's gaining ground in mainstream institutions and culture and politics.

And the rise of Trump I think is in part because he was seen as a character that had the power to stand against that because he was shameless and there were very few others who would actually effectively stand against it.

And his antagonisms against that culture were proof that he had the balls as it were to be someone who wouldn't just lay over and give in to it.

And so his willingness to say the taboo, to come out with taboos enabled the Overton window to be stretched in the direction that it needed to be. That's part of the reason I think also that defensive urge that we need to defend against a fearful defensive urge against a deeply vicious left that will try and destroy right institutions on the right, conservative institutions, Christian institutions.

[22 : 11] And Nagel's only a petty offender on this front, but I think she fails to recognize just how widespread and disparate the forces and parties that were opposed to this social justice warrior class actually are.

Some of the more interesting and illuminating characters I think weren't really discussed. She maybe focuses a bit too much upon the extreme. She's talking about a toxic, a deeply toxic extreme culture.

And yet there are a lot of figures that the idea that you have this deeply toxic culture and then you have this bridge that moves it into the mainstream.

I don't think that's the most helpful way of seeing the situation. I think what you're seeing are broader shifts within the culture. And there are pockets exploding outside of the existing Overton window because the Overton window has become more and more restrictive.

And so you have these deeply toxic sorts of bubbles that are opening up elsewhere where these subversive subcultural movements are arising.

[23 : 17] But there is this broader tension within society. And it may be more illuminating to focus upon other more moderate reactions and shifts that are occurring.

So people who are the borderline characters rather than the people at the extremes focus on the margins, not the extremes. And I think you'll see a lot more.

So I thought her focus on the new atheist, her attention to the new atheist movement was particularly promising and interesting on this front. And there could have been a lot more said about that.

In particular, why is it that the new atheist movement has become so anti-social justice warrior? Why is it that it's become so much more clearly associated with men?

I think there's a number of reasons for this. I think the first thing is that there has been a breakdown of consensus upon in the atheist movement.

[24 : 12] So increasingly now you have a movement that is very much about social justice atheism, that's pushing back against atheism, that's pushing back against Christianity and these sorts of things that are culturally imperialist, whatever it is.

And all these toxic homophobic, transphobic, etc. views, the white male patriarchy that's represented by religious cultures, the Me Too concerns about abuse within Christian and other religious contexts.

And so these are the sorts of concerns that are really animating a particular sort of atheist movement that's more feminist in its tone. But yet the traditional new atheist movement was founded around the hard sciences.

So you had the hard sciences and debating. So it was a culture that was, as she observed very well, the culture of so-and-so destroys such-and-such.

This title that you'll often find on YouTube. In the past, that used to be about new atheists destroying some Christian thinker and some religious viewpoint.

[25 : 22] And now it's increasingly associated with someone defeating a social justice warrior, a feminist, whatever it is. And that is important.

It recognises a shift that has occurred within that culture. And the shift is also in part because the tactics of that old movement were deeply pugnacious, belligerent.

You unflinchingly hold up, face the reality of the world and society, and you speak the truth. And so it's a culture of truth. It's a culture of conflict and struggle and combat, of strong debate.

So it's people like Christopher Hitchens, characters like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, these sorts of characters. And these characters, first of all, they're male.

They're associated with a particular Oxbridge culture of antagonist, of agonistic debate and struggle and combat through ideas. And with a very male, hard sciences focused, focus.

[26 : 27] And sometimes more towards certain areas of the autistic spectrum would come out there as well. And what you have is a deeply male movement, hard sciences, things like that.

And the key issue for them, in many respects, is evolution and evolutionary theory, which deals with the reality of nature, the reality of the world, its objective force that must be reckoned with, and the danger of ideologues trying to distract us or oppose the reality of the world and make it more palatable.

And so it's interesting seeing the way that these movements against the social justice left have increasingly been placed on the fault line of evolutionary theory.

So people like Brett Weinstein is a good example of someone who's an evolutionary biologist and someone who's got caught up in these struggles.

The movement of Jordan Peterson is a good example. Again, Jordan Peterson's position is very much focused upon let's come to grips with nature as it really is. Recognise there are differences between men and women.

[27 : 42] That hierarchy is something that's built into our ways of interacting with the world. That we are adapted to reality. That chaos and order and these sorts of things are part of reality.

That Jungian psychology is a way of grappling with a sort of human ethology. And you have movements like Jonathan Haidt as well. Jonathan Haidt, his view of morality is very much focused upon evolutionary adaptation to the world and the way that certain moral structures and categories arise out of that.

And he's again moved against the social justice left and argued for more free speech. His involvement with the heterodox academy. He is an interesting character because he's not straightforwardly on the right or the left.

He's more of a centrist liberal. But he's someone who's been pushed in this direction. Same with Peterson, Weinstein. A lot of the people in Quillette. The Quillette movement.

These are anthropologists, evolutionary scientists, other people in the sciences who feel that there is a push against the hard sciences from the social justice left.

[28 : 53] An attempt to close down these things. It's also associated with STEM subjects. With maths and with engineering and with young men, particularly, who are involved in these areas and are increasingly feeling that they're being described as toxic.

That all these ideas that have no foundation in actual science or research are being pushed against them to close down their culture. Other interesting characters that would be worth exploring are someone like Julian Assange, who previously had been very associated with the left, the sort of libertarian left.

And now is far more associated with the libertarian right. Those sorts of shifts are very instructive. It's the marginal characters, the one that shift, that show where the fault lines have emerged.

So the new atheist movement shows that it's a fight about nature. So it's a fight about are we going to deal with the hard reality of nature? And that can take forms from actual morality that's working with the grain of the world, understanding gender differences.

It can also move in the direction of human biodiversity, the racist movements and things like that. In all of these cases, what we see is evolutionary theory and nature are seen as fault lines.

[30 : 21] So are there innumerable genders? Are there innumerable sexes? Is there such a thing as the sex binary? And these are the questions that we're increasingly fighting over. So this hard and soft social science, soft or social science conflict is very important one for understanding what's taking place.

And there's the confusion of left and right wing oppositions at this point. So a lot of the people who had previously have been very strongly against conservative Christians now find themselves joining with Christians in struggling against social justice left characters who are not willing to accept nature and other categories like that that would close down their idea of a highly egalitarian, inclusive society.

Where there's no restrictions upon the way that we can engineer things, construct things and socially manage the ideals and enact them.

And so you have on the right, there's some of it, there's a triggering of this, hate facts, things like that. All these facts that really show that the left's theories do not fit, the progressive left's theories do not fit.

But then there's also this strong resistance on the part of serious scientists who are saying that there are deep problems here. Other factors to look at are the left's alienating significant or pathologising certain portions of their traditional base.

[31 : 52] So Bernie Sanders supporters are associated with brochure-ism and Sanders, sort of Bernie bros and things like that. The idea that this is a male culture and so it's a male, white male, straight white male culture and so it can be described as toxic and so it can be squeezed out.

Other interesting characters to observe, rationalists and the grey tribe, the libertarians, people who, Scott Alexander, characters like that, who increasingly, they would have been in the loose orbit of the new atheist movement.

They would also have been very much involved in online debating, other things like that. Very concerned with sciences, STEM subjects. And yet, although all their traditional leanings are towards libertarian left, they are increasingly finding themselves pushed out of those circles, struggling with the context that is pathologising their white male character, attacking nerds, things like that, and geeks.

And so someone like Scott Alexander's blog, Slate Star Codex, about 90% of the readers there are male. And it's a culture that is not straightforwardly libertarian.

It's something a bit more complicated than that, nor is it straightforwardly new atheist. And he has come out in favour of someone like, appreciative of Jordan Peterson, pushing back against some of the scaremongering on Trump, other things like that.

[33 : 23] And yet he's someone who would very much fall down into the left in many respects, fall within the left camp. But there is a push there and there's a sense that the left is, its base is fragmenting and the progressive left is increasingly squeezing out other parties.

Other things that will be interesting is focusing upon the lighter end of gaming and meme culture. So these are not just the alt-light people who are pushing an ideology.

Think more about it as a culture, a loose culture that bounds people together. So people like Felix Schellberg or PewDiePie, who's the most subscribed, maybe not anymore, but the most subscribed YouTuber.

And he is a character that gathers a lot of particularly young men together. Meme culture is very much his thing. But yet he's an interesting character in other ways.

He's more complicated than he might seem. He's sort of provocateur in some respects, gets in trouble for some of the things he says. There's edgy humour that is increasingly pathologised and problematised and that sort of thing.

[34 : 33] But yet there's more to him than that. And I think that culture that has developed around him that has increasingly become immune to many of the statements on the progressive left that would try and show how toxic all these things are.

They've actually paid attention to this guy who's the most subscribed person. And he's actually a lot more straightforward. He's not someone who's trying to be a Nazi or anything like that.

He's a silly comedian. And yet he's also someone who's starting to read 70 books in the past year, things like that. He's a lot more thoughtful than he might appear.

And there are a lot of people within that constituency that recognise that. And identify with that. That's their culture. They find their peers and their friends through games, through sharing memes and that sort of subcultural context.

And they're constantly finding them pathologised by themselves, pathologised by the mainstream. And now they just have gone off the mainstream. They don't believe the mainstream media anymore. They're not natural extremists.

[35 : 40] They're not Nazis or anything like that. But they just don't trust the mainstream. And they realise that the mainstream has it in for them. And so that is a constituency that is increasingly shifting away from left-wing groups that they would have previously been quite happy with.

They would generally be socially liberal. But yet now they're finding themselves more drawn to people on the right. So the rise of people on YouTube, right-wing commentators, things like that, and people who are appealing...

Dave Rubin and Joe Rogan and other characters like that are appealing to this sort of demographic. Demographic that has been alienated by the mainstream culture that constantly pathologises them.

Other characters that might be interesting to pay attention to are smart popularisers of neo-reaction thought. I'm thinking of someone like Steve Saylor. Very smart guy.

Very observant. Predicts certain trends before they emerge. Deeply politically incorrect. And has race, realists, and other things in there. But he recognises real trends that other people do not allow themselves to see.

[36 : 55] Other things that would be interesting would be how Nagel would update her thesis. So you could make a reasonable case at the time of Trump's election that someone like Milo was the key character in the alt-right and 4chaners.

They were the vanguard of anti-social justice. But is that the case anymore? I'm not sure that it is. Those figures and movements seem to have taken a considerable dip in popularity.

Partly due to social media crackdowns. Milo being removed from Twitter. And the scandal over his remarks about paedophilia.

And in other cases these characters have sunk without a trace. No one's really talking about them much anymore. And so I think it might be helpful to distinguish between the constituency and the groups and the organisations that represent them.

Or the figures that they put forward. So there's a broader constituency here. And there's a lot of figures that loosely emerge from that constituency as leaders or representatives of that constituency.

[37 : 58] And there are various movements that they associate with. But they can easily switch. And there's no sense that this is a very hard defined group. And Nagel recognises the fungible politics of digital groupings.

But in parts I think she might over-determine the commitments of the group she is describing. There is a very loose commitment to a certain sort of cultural feel.

And a resistance to other forms of culture. And that can take a great deal and great number of different forms depending upon the context and the time and the way that things are playing out.

So these constituencies aren't that committed to any one movement, person or organisation. And they can swiftly move on. And this is in part because we're talking about young people here.

Particularly young boys and young men. And they grow up. They change as they grow up. And a lot of the tensions, I think, another factor is, a lot of the tensions of the culture war have become much more mainstream.

[38 : 56] So to actually struggle against these factors that you're facing within the culture war, you don't have to turn to the marginal figures like Milo in the same way.

The struggle with the call-out culture of the left is so much more familiar now. And one doesn't have to look to someone like Milo to find someone speaking out against it. A lot of people are moving against that progressive culture.

And it's more mainstream now. And so I think that's made a difference. There's also the need for catharsis. A lot of people, when they're facing this sort of culture again and again, they just get sick of it.

Particularly when they see that the mainstream comedians cannot make fun of this stuff anymore. It's all politically correct. It has to abide by the norms.

It has to be right on humour. It has to always make fun of Trump and things like that. And it just gets boring after a while. Because you see people saying that there are, that biological sex is not a real thing.

[40 : 02] Can't you make fun of that? I mean, if there's anything to be made fun of, that is something to be made fun of. And so this cracking down of humour, I think, is in part an explanation for the rise of this ever more taboo humour.

When the mainstream has so squeezed out humour, you will have it popping up in areas that are deeply outside, very much outside of the mainstream. And Milo's appeal, I think, is part of this.

That you need to understand just how cathartic it is for people to see someone poking this culture in the eye and making fun of it and just showing how ridiculous it is.

And to have fun in a culture that tends to stigmatise all of this. The other thing that's worth paying attention to is the fact that so many young men are drawn to characters like Jordan Peterson.

To religion, to movements like the so-called intellectual dark web. That these are new things that have happened primarily since Nagel's book was written. The rising young right doesn't seem to be straightforwardly about a commitment to transgression.

[41 : 10] There's a lot being said about classical civilisation, traditional architecture and things like that. And they become charged with culture war significance as any appreciation for historic Western culture and norms in the face of the tide of modernity, post-modernity, the gender ideology, anti-Western grievance culture, all these sorts of things and the assault upon the humanities.

All of that is something that represents an appreciation for traditional Western culture as regressive and transgressive. But is it really that transgressive?

When the whole culture has normalised transgression, actually standing for something traditional can be seen as transgressive and edgy. Particularly, there are ways in which this gets often smeared as having connection with crypto-racist positions and sometimes actual racist positions.

But there's a lot that's taking place there that does not easily fall into the category of transgression. And the appeal of someone like Jordan Peterson, part of it is Jordan Peterson destroys Kathy Newman or something like that, or this feminist position.

But a lot of it is young people, but young men especially, trying to find their way and trying to find a sense of purpose and meaning and possibility within the world.

[42 : 38] The intellectual dark web, for all its pretensions about itself, is also wanting a culture where we think seriously, where thought isn't completely colonised by anti-Western ideology, by anti-white male ideology, by gender ideology, all these sorts of things.

Let's think seriously about the world. Let's think seriously about nature. Let's think seriously about society. Many people are wanting to do this and it needs to be recognised that this isn't just about transgression.

This is people wanting to construct something in a society that has made their very identity transgressive. If you're asserting anything as a straight white cis male, there is something suspicious about that.

If you're asserting your identity, not in the sense of an identity, white identity politics or anything like that. But just being unapologetic and pursuing something for yourself and recognising culture that has a dignified place for you as something good, that is increasingly pushed back against.

So transgression is more complicated, I think, than it seems on the surface. There is certainly a significant element of transgression, but there are also a lot within these movements that are pushing back against a mere transgressive aesthetic.

[44 : 04] It's saying transgression is not actually all that good, but we do have to have the balls and the backbone to stand up against this sort of culture. And this emasculated attitude of just rolling over and giving into it is not going to do.

You have to stand up and be a man. And that is a lot of what's taking place. And there's a transgressive element to that, this ability to resist and go against the mainstream culture.

But it's not in the ultimate service of transgression as such, or just celebrating an aesthetic of transgression. She also recognises the gender dynamics, but there's a lot more that can be said about this.

Scott Alexander has written a great piece called *The Movement Is Not The Ideology*. And what he observes within that is that movements are, they have certain ideas that they're associated with, certain principles that they uphold.

But often we are mistaken if we think that they are primarily about those ideas, that those ideas are what explain everything about the dynamics of the movement.

[45 : 11] In many cases, it's people needing a group to which to belong. And so, for instance, the new atheist movement were typically young men looking for a movement to belong to that unflinchingly wrestled with the resistant objectivity of the world.

That appreciated combative debate, hard over soft sciences. They were more thing than people oriented. They were very much opposed to conformist movements. Movements that stigmatise and close down dangerous inquiry, or which pose rougher interactions.

It's about resistance to censorship of ideas. This idea that we can censor ideas for social ends, that you don't want to unsettle the status quo.

And many new atheists have become anti-social justice warriors, warrior figures, and found common cause with many conservative Christians that they once forcefully attacked. Precisely because that is the sort of, they have a sense of identity.

They have something that is really, that movement is catering to them. And the social justice movement is very much closing down and attacking and stigmatising the type of people they are.

[46 : 28] Quite directly, as young white males, and generally straight. But also, as those who are interested in dangerous ideas. Who are interested in wrestling with the objectivity of the world.

As those who behold a belief in evolution. And evolution is not appreciated on the social justice left. So, there are a lot of common causes there. But it's important to recognise that this movement is not just about atheist ideas.

It is about that. It's about evolution. It's about things like the hard sciences. But it's also about a certain feel that helps people to belong. It's about a certain type of movement that attracts a certain type of personality.

And if we recognise that, I think it will help us to understand just how gendered a lot of the dynamics that we're experiencing today are. What we're seeing in many cases are male versus female tendencies in group.

In socialisation. And sociality. So, female groups enforce conformity through manufacture consensus. So, mean girls dynamic. And it's rendering certain people toxic.

[47 : 38] Bad-mouthing people. And having a situation where gossip and other things like that lead to people being squeezed out. So, you don't actually beat people through direct debate and conflict about ideas.

Rather, you squeeze people out. You appeal to third parties to close other people down. And you have a culture of performative weakness.

A weakness that gets other people to intervene. That's very much about harnessing the power of the group rather than individuals. So, it's a hive mentality, particularly. Male groups have a much rougher, more direct, antagonistic dynamic.

And often antagonistic. When we're talking about male and female groups. For instance, when we talk about Gamergate. Gamergate had all these. It was a. Had an ideology.

And it was associated with a particular movement. But it needs to be recognised just how much of this was about male spaces. And women's involvement in those male spaces.

[48 : 40] So, men, young men have particularly bonded through the context of games. And gaming culture. And geek culture. And that's traditionally been something that men have formed.

Young men have formed and participated in. And found a sense of belonging in that context. Then young women enter that context. And particularly young women who aren't interested in the dynamics of that group.

And they want to change everything. They want to make it more hospitable to them. And so they close down the culture. They declare that the sort of men that form that culture.

The sort of culture that has drawn people to that context. Those contexts. Is toxic. And problematic. And they want to reform it radically. And in a way that pushes out the people who originally form.

Primarily formed that culture. And who primarily populate that culture. And so the Gamergate thing. Is very much about that sort of struggle. About a struggle over a particular sort of culture.

[49 : 43] And who can belong within it. So there's a sense of cultural appropriation here. But when we talk about cultural appropriation. We're usually talking about minority cultures.

The idea that there might be a culture for young white males. That they can belong to. That they can affiliate with others in. That is seen as a bad thing. But there's a lot of talk about the need for female spaces.

The need for women to enter into traditionally male spaces. And change the dynamics. But there are a lot of young men who feel stifled. Because all of their contexts are increasingly having to play to.

They're having to conform. They're having to play nice. And things like that. But they find a great deal of belonging in more agonistic. Combative places. And that's not a bad thing.

But the mainstream is not giving them any outlet for that. And so increasingly they're being pushed to ever more extreme cultures. And this is a real problem. And I think it's also a problem where we're seeing this dynamic of a certain sort of female society.

[50 : 45] That's becoming more extreme as it's struggling with a society that is extremely male. And antagonistically male. And deeply hostile to the mainstream.

And then you have this female society that's hyper protective and maternal in its dynamics. It's wanting to protect the vulnerable. And then taking this sort of mama bear approach to anyone that would attack the cubs.

It's vicious and vindictive and deeply hostile to anyone who's seen as a predator character. And those predator characters are associated with identities such as white male.

And so these antagonisms that we're seeing online are deeply gendered. They're playing into typical gender tendencies. Men and women are very different in their sociality and their dynamics of association.

And as groups these things rise to an extreme. So whereas if you're talking about individuals there are lots of individuals who are outliers. Men who associate more like women and women who associate more like men.

[51 : 46] But when we're talking about groups male and female groups they will play to the tendency. And that tendency will be exalted and will tend to be more extreme. And so male groups will tend to be more agonistic.

They will tend to struggle and value that. They'll be more about agency. They'll be more about bonding through a common thing orientation. Through a common orientation to some activity or action or obsession or interest.

And so there's a reason why Wikipedia is 90% male. There's a reason why debates on news sites are 80% male. These are contexts that play to male tendencies.

On the other hand 80% of fan fiction sites are female. If you're looking at something like Pinterest that's very much sharing images of home and things like that.

It's predominantly female. And there are different tendencies here. And unless we take seriously that men and women are different. We'll find it difficult to understand just how different these tendencies are.

[52 : 50] And how they are playing out in the online environment. So what you're seeing is an intense antagonism on both sides. Men who are deeply misogynistic.

Antagonistic to anything that represents women. And on the other hand women who represent anything that's male. And that's typically male. As toxic. And as something that needs to be closed down.

And that is a problem for both sides. It's not good for anyone. And so the male groups that are being formed in this context. Are increasingly extreme.

Because they're pushing back against a mainstream. That is trying to close them down. And the more that they try and do that. The more their culture will have to become toxic. To prevent it from being appropriated.

There are real issues here. But the appeal of Jordan Peterson again is illuminating in this context. Nietzschean ideas can hold a particular appeal for young men.

[53 : 48] Especially in a society that is emasculating as ours. And Nietzsche puts his finger upon something very important. Something about the difference between the man whose goodness consists merely in meek conformity.

In weakness of will, passivity, spinelessness, moodiness and resentment to the world. This anima possessed man as Jung might call it. This man who's just decent and good because he's not able to stand for anything.

He's not got any backbone. He's just a conformist, someone who says yes dear to everything that his wife demands of him. And the man who, the alternative to this is the man who forms order out of chaos.

The man who exercises robust agency. The man who manifests strength, courage, mastery and honour. And the man who's able to stand up for himself and form a coherent life and a sense of identity and destiny.

And Peterson's work really speaks to that sort of character. It speaks to the sort of moral vision that scratches an itch in men in particular.

[54 : 51] The itch that exists where the goodness of their virility is being suppressed by modern society. And the vicious reaction to Peterson is instructive as well. Especially in how often it is focused upon explicitly the fact that he's empowering young men.

You shouldn't empower young men. Men, young men are needed to be quiescent, accommodating. They need to be empowering of women but they need to step back.

They can't assert themselves. They can't stand up. They can't exercise their strengths. And the contemporary vision of young men tends to focus upon their accommodating to the needs of feminism.

And the empowerment of women. And that's the case in the church too. In many, many cases. Men must learn to be nice and tame. To submit entirely and apologetically to women's determination and moral virtue.

Whereas for Peterson he recognises there is something about virility that is good. That needs to be recovered. There's a very good piece written on American Affairs a while back.

[55 : 55] That I just read recently about Walter White as a Nietzschean character. And it gets things really, it really observes it well. That Walter White as he exists at the beginning of Breaking Bad.

Is seen as a good decent character. But yet he's this man who has no agency really. He's someone who's weak and quiescent.

He's someone who's conformist. He's someone who's just, you have his wife Skylar who's very much about safety. And who really stifles him.

And has this very claustrophobic environment within the home that she creates. He has this overbearing boss in the car wash. He's ridiculed by his students and not taken seriously by them.

He has a young female headmistress who's, I mean, it's not really developing his strength in any way. He can't exert his strength.

[56 : 53] He's someone who has all these gifts in chemistry. And now he's just a high school teacher. He's someone who wants to have a dignified role in his family. But he's just mollycoddled by his wife.

And he's someone who wants to have a sense of mentorship. And to raise the next generation. And yet he's ridiculed. And so there's all these things that are lost.

And within his work what he's trying to do is form order out of chaos. The chaos of his life. To find some sense of destiny. And it involves a turn towards evil. But that turn towards evil is also a development of certain virtues of strength.

Moral agency. Of all these sorts of things that are trying to forge an identity. A forge order out of chaos. And not just meekly submit to the situation of the last man.

And this is something that Nietzsche put his finger upon. And I think someone like Peterson is speaking to that. That many young men are concerned that they're within a society that gives them no real dignity of agency.

[58 : 03] It squashes their virility. It gives them no sense of a dominion that they can have. That they can rule within. That they can have a dignified place within their family. They're primarily supposed to step back.

To disengage. And to be meek and apologetic. And this is a problem for many young men who are growing up and find no bearings. And so either they become anima-possessed.

As Peterson and Jung would talk about it. Or they become people who stand up for themselves. And that will often involve a sort of transgression. A stepping outside of the mainstream.

Now that forms a lurch towards deep transgression for some. That they find delight in transgression itself. Because it's this sort of puerile rebellion against the mollycoddling.

The nannying. The nagging and the scolding of the feminized mainstream. Or it can become a far more thoughtful.

[59 : 02] And an approach with more integrity of its own. That stands up and says we're going to develop strength. Not in reaction against the culture. And in a puerile sort of rebellion.

But we're going to be people who have character. And we're going to forge a sense of self and purpose within that context. And so I think many of the people within this culture.

Pushing back for instance against the meme of the non-player character. The NPC. The one who is the consummate conformist. Who doesn't speak or act for him or herself. But is merely an outlet for the reigning ideology.

As Peterson talks about it. The ideologically possessed. That you can predict exactly what they're going to say on any particular issue. And part of the purpose of the transgression and the resistance.

Is the sense that that is what the mainstream wants you to become. The mainstream wants you to become a non-player character. Someone who has no agency of their own.

[59 : 59] Who meekly just parrots the ideology. And yet has no sense of who you are. The dignity that you might have. And a purpose that you might have. Perhaps the biggest gap in the book.

Was the failure to discuss the media that are catalyzing these conflicts. So what we're seeing in many respects. Is a conflict. That is created by digital media.

And digital social media in particular. What digital social media has done. Has amplified the traditional dynamics. Of more female spaces. Of female sociality.

Which is very much about tight. Connected. Hyper-connected. Densely social networks. And the means of establishing conformity. Within those.

Through a certain sort of social pressure. Through ostracizing certain people. Through presenting other people. As pathological or toxic.

[60 : 59] Through appealing to third parties. Or the crowd. To act on your behalf. And those sorts of networks. Are amplified by social media. So it allows traditionally female dynamics.

That would be enacted. Primarily within the close network. Of a community. Or in the context of the home. And domestic or family environments. It allows those dynamics.

To play out. On the larger social. And political stage. And so the sort of politics. That we're seeing now. Is very much a female sort of politics. It's a politics of hyper-protective.

Maternal instinct. Protecting the child-like figures. Against who. Victims who have no agency of their own. Against predator figures. And those predator figures.

Are seen very much. Just in terms of identities. White males. Cis. Straight. Etc. And then the. On the other hand.

[61 : 56] You have this. Need for. Deep sociality. Against these toxic forces. That are trying to infiltrate. And undermine. That culture from without.

So they have to repel. The barbarians. They have to form this culture. That's deeply. That is constantly. Weeding out transgressors.

That is maintaining. This really close. This really close clique. At the heart. The other thing. That's important to notice. This alternative culture.

Which is an unmappable culture. Of meme. Meme culture. Of trolls. Of anonymous. And pseudonymous. Characters.

That are existing. Within a form of internet. That is the old internet. 4chan. Is the old internet. Reddit. Is the old internet. YouTube. Is.

[62 : 50] A different sort of sociality. But. Not so much. The old internet. But. It has certain. Of the characteristics. Of the old internet. Particularly in the comments. And the sorts of communities.

That exist within the comments. And the comments. Of sites. As well. Commenting culture. That's the old internet. And these are differences. Between male and female networks.

Men. Primarily finding. Community. Through doing things together. Through common agency. Through common obsessions. And interests. And female networks. That very much. Person focused.

Inclusion focused. And focused. Upon protecting people. Upon forming a community. A fandom. A community. Of some type.

That gives people. A sense of belonging. And the different methods. Associated with these. Are significant to notice too. So. The technology. Has enabled. Different sorts of methods.

[63 : 44] So for the. Male. Sort of. Groups of. The marginal groups. They're very much. Meme and troll culture. That requires. It's unmappable culture.

The old internet. Is unmappable. It's the dark web. And it's one of. The reasons. I think it's significant. The intellectual dark web. Is known. As the intellectual dark web. There's a struggle.

For the very structure. Of the life. Of the internet here. There's a struggle. Between the new. Paved over. And social. Internet. That's. Policed by. Groups like.

Facebook. And Twitter. That you can appeal to. And get them to act. On your behalf. Close down. Toxic groups. That's hyper social. Very much. Playing into. Female tendencies. And the old.

Anonymous internet. Which is very much. Like the frontier. That you go to. And you interact. About ideas. And you struggle. With each other. And you don't have a clue. Who these other people are. And there's.

[64 : 38] But there's a sense. Of belonging. In the crowd. And within the group. And these. Connections. Are far looser. They're far broader. They're far less personal. And these are differences.

Between male and female networks. Facilitated. By different forms. Of. Social media. And until we understand that. I think we'll struggle. To understand. Exactly.

Why the dynamics. Play out. As they do. And the unmappable. Character of meme. And troll culture. That you really. I mean. There's no algorithm. That you can easily develop. To map this.

I mean. How do you tell. If someone's being ironic. Or serious or not. You just have to be. Deeply embedded. In that culture. You have to know it. Intimately. And that requires. A sort of knowledge.

That cannot be. Policed. In the same way. It's resistant. To policing. It's resistant. To the means. Of the new internet. Which very much. Is about mapping. Conforming people.

[65 : 33] To algorithms. Making people. So that interchangeable. Profiles. That can all be mapped. On to. That can all. Be mapped. On to a.

Social media system. And then. Mined by algorithms. For useful properties. The old internet. Of the meme. And troll culture. Of anonymous. Personalities.

Things like that. Is resistant. To this. It's resistant. To the conformism. It's resistant. To the policing. And the closing down. Of culture. That this involves. A lot more.

That could be said. On this book. It's a very interesting book. It raises some huge. Issues. That deserve. A lot more attention. Than it can give it. But I hope this video. Has been of some help.

again tomorrow.

