

EPISODE 1A

SETTING THE TABLE

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number one of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now as you well know, there are about a zillion podcasts out there. Which means that right now I've got about a half an hour or so to convince you that you should continue listening to this one in particular. So let's get started.

Well, the first obvious question is: What is this podcast all about? And the short, obvious answer is: It's about the end of the world. Not the physical end, mind you. Although that does seem to be more and more of a possibility these days. No, what I am referring to is the cultural death spiral that we're going through right now. That Crazy Land thing that we are all surrounded by and that we all find ourselves living through.

But that doesn't mean that this is a political podcast. Because, for the record, I don't consider myself right wing or left wing. In fact, as we shall see, I consider all of those people to be members of different sects of the same religion. As different offshoots of the same ideology. That's for the near future, though. For the moment, though, this means that I won't be ranting and railing about the news of the day.

Nor will I be interviewing other people to hear their takes on the subject.

What I am going to be doing is to try to explain to you exactly how and exactly why we—and by 'we' I mean the entire Western world—how we have gotten ourselves into this state of affairs. And I can pretty much guarantee to you up front that you almost definitely haven't heard the argument that I am going to make and the thesis that I am about to submit.

Although in no way am I suggesting that the answer is simple. Quite the opposite, in fact. Well, actually, it is simple. Kind of like the Theory of Relativity is pretty simple once you grasp it. The grasping of it, though, especially when you've been taught completely different things your whole life, now that's a little more complex.

And, just to assure you here at the beginning, I certainly don't have any sort of wacky ideology or religion that I am pushing. In fact, what you are going to be hearing is a lot of serious stuff: History, Philosophy, the natural sciences and the social sciences. Indeed, even though I promise to stay

completely away from academic jargon, the effect is probably going to be sort of like that of listening to a college course. Although, if I may say so, a really interesting college course.

And the reason why I'm going to have to get all intellectual on you is that it is really difficult to state what my thesis is in thirty words or less. Sure, I can do metaphors and analogies. For instance, what if you were one of those people in the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes who was actually seeing the imaginary clothing? Now none of us thinks that we ourselves would ever be that stupid or shallow. But wasn't that the whole point of the fable? And how did the people in the fable then react towards the little boy who pointed out the obvious?

Or consider all of those people who lived in the Soviet Union. Now I'll be going over this point in much more detail in Episode 4. But, contrary to our propaganda, it turns out that the vast majority of Soviet citizens, including people who were doctors and engineers and historians and scientists, absolutely believed that Marxism had been scientifically proven to be correct. And that whatever problems that they saw around them were a function of just not having been able to implement Marxism correctly.

Sounds crazy, right?

Well, as I've already said, we here in the Western World are now pretty much in Crazy Land ourselves. And although I myself had been predicting something like this for decades, still the speed and the vehemence with which it has occurred has shocked even me.

So here's the first hint of what my thesis is: Just like those good Soviet citizens didn't think that they were living in an ideology, but that Marxism actually accurately portrayed Reality, so, too, do we in the West think that what we have been taught is Reality. Whereas in fact it has just been a bizarre ideology. And just as the Soviet Union fell apart because of the internal contradictions inherent in an insane ideology, so, too, are we in the West falling apart now. Because of our equally insane ideology.

Which nobody in the West believes is an ideology.

See? I told you that you probably haven't heard this one before.

Okay. As they say in science, dramatic claims require dramatic proof. And I don't blame you one bit if you're immediately skeptical about what I've just said. But that's why, as I've already intimated, it's going to take a while for me to, as it were, explain all the details. But if you're willing to hang with me and to give me at least the slightest benefit of the doubt, I believe that I can do that.

Of course, one of the hallmarks of being in Crazy Land is that nobody and nothing seems to

make sense any more. The old answers no longer provide an answer. But that doesn't mean that a lot of people won't continue to hold on to those old answers as if those answers will somehow magically restore sanity. Well, they won't. So let me say right now that if you are one of those people who is absolutely convinced that there is a 'Republican Party' answer to this or if you are one of those people who is absolutely convinced that there is a 'Democratic Party' answer to this, then you might as well stop listening right now. Because I probably won't be able to get through to you.

Okay. I've maybe lost a few listeners now. And I may be about to get rid of some more. Because I'm going to use a word that the word police have told you that you can't use. It's a word that has totally changed its meaning in the past sixty years. It used to refer to people who were born with severe mental deficiencies. Now it refers to people who were born with normal abilities but who act as if they were born with a mental deficiency. And I'm sorry that there isn't another word which perfectly describes this state of affairs. But there isn't. So I will have to say it: Retarded.

And the reason why I have to use the word retarded is that I'm not even being figurative here, as in the phrase 'that's to retarded'. No, I'm being literal. Because it is incredibly important for you to understand that so much of present day behavior is literally what would have been only done by the mentally disadvantaged fifty or sixty years ago.

Let me give you some examples. Which, first of all, is going to give you an idea of how old I am.

Because I'm old enough to clearly remember what it was actually like fifty or sixty years ago. Walking down the streets of 1955. Actually being part of the Sixties. Experiencing how everything good about the Sixties fell apart in the late Seventies. And I can remember all this without the disadvantage of only knowing the past through the lens of ideologically driven rewritten history.

Anyway, here is some of what I remember:

Now back when I was a kid, like most other kids, I really enjoyed reading comic books. But there came a time, at around the age of thirteen, when I outgrew that. No desire whatsoever. And back then the only people in America who were older than, say, fourteen who still read comic books (or, as they are called today, graphic novels) well, those of markedly inferior intelligence. In other words, retarded.

Same thing with wearing baseball caps if you weren't actually playing baseball. Back then the only adults who wore them were those who still had the mental age of ten year olds.

And I liked my Sugar Pops just as much as the next kid. But the idea of trying to market sugary breakfast cereals or Pop Tarts or whatever to actual adults back then would have seemed something between absurd and disturbing. After all, everyone knew that once you grew up you developed adult tastes. And the only adults in existence who still craved that sugary crap were, well, retarded people.

Finally, take Halloween. Now when I was a kid Halloween was a relatively minor event with just about zero marketing involved. One night a year kids put on cheap costumes and roamed their neighborhood knocking on doors and collecting candy. Kids. By themselves. Not chaperoned by adults. And if you were only six or seven you went around with an older sibling. Or the kid next door.

And by the time you were thirteen you weren't a kid any more. You just had no desire to do that kid stuff. I mean, an eighth grader putting on a costume? They would have been, at best, an object of pity.

Now a couple of years ago there was a major battle in the political correctness wars. Administrators at Yale University sent around guidelines to all the students there about what was and was not an inoffensive, culturally appropriate Halloween costume. And one professor, a Progressive who believed in free speech, responded with an email questioning why 21 year old adults shouldn't be allowed to figure these things out for themselves. Further, she suggested that maybe causing a little offense wasn't really all that offensive anyway. Well, that did it for her. And in the end she felt like she had to leave her University position. So much for that career.

But in all the brouhaha about this kerfluffel no one ever brought up this point: Why is it that 21 year old adults, at the tippy tippy top of intelligence and achievement, are going around behaving like ten year olds of fifty years ago? Why is this?

Can you honestly think of any other answer than: Because the entire culture has become totally retarded?

And you can also see this in relatively new behaviors which didn't exist back then.

Consider Selfies. If the technology had been available back then, what adult who wasn't simpleminded would have taken endless pictures of themselves? Or dwell on how many likes they got or how many Facebook friends that they had? Who in decades past above the age of fourteen would have cared about such things?

Or take watching professional wrestling. Or watching the Kardashians or the Bachelor or the Real Housewives. Or watching sitcoms with endless potty mouth jokes. Or how about having your ears suddenly all offended because the word police had just told you that a word that had been in

common usage was now all of a sudden naughty? I'm sorry, but it's just all around you. And I am well aware in giving all of these examples that some of you listening might well do some of them yourselves. Hey, we all do stupid things. But, just like a person who is addicted to smoking can also freely admit that it is a bad and unhealthy habit, I would hope that at least some part of you can recognize that all of these behaviors are not remotely what one should expect to see in a real adult. And that if any real adult from any real civilization before the 21st Century were to witness the actual adults of today behaving like that, that they would freak.

Although you might readily admit the innate dumbness of the examples that I have been giving. But you might also respond that these examples don't in themselves prove that the entire culture is corrupted. Okay, that's a good point. So let's talk about the New York Times.

Now when I was a kid I was geeky enough that I really liked reading newspapers. But the New York Times, now that was way too austere and formal for me to want to tackle. Column after column of small print. Hardly any pictures. In fact, its nickname was the Grey Lady. Really somber adult stuff.

And here are a few headlines from the front page of the New York Times on the day I was born: 'Churchill Thinks Soviet Line Does Not Portend War Soon'. 'Paris Mobilizes Trucks, Cars, Buses In Transit Strike Jam'. 'Greek Rightist Threatens to Rearm His Guerrillas, Halt Appeasement'.

Now these days the front page of the Times is usually completely filled up with stories about what a big fat dummy Donald Trump is. But, as I sit here, here are some other headlines from today's edition: 'What Perfume Are You Wearing? Now You Never Have To Tell'. 'Meet Jaimie Wilson, A Transgender Activist With Guitar In Hand'. And here is a big feature article: 'Is RuPaul's Drag Race The Most Radical Show On TV?'

Grey Lady indeed. It turns out that the cognitive elite consume just as much retarded trash as the rest of us. In fact, in a lot of ways what they're into is way more childish and lowbrow than what working class people were into fifty years ago. But the really absurd thing is that said cognitive elite are totally unaware of how empty minded it all is. Which is, when you think about it, the exact same situation with the truly mentally deficient.

And I could go on and on. But, as I've already said, I'm not just using the word 'retarded' for its shock value. Because there is a very essential purpose in doing this. For if there's one thing that we really need to agree on right here at the beginning, if there is one issue that is central to the podcast, it is that we are all currently surrounded by a world that can only be described as retarded. Crazy, too, of

course. And the two concepts aren't really all that far apart. But all of us, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Democrats and Republicans, we are all riding around in the same clown car. Because it's only once we can fully accept that and internalize that, that we can really have the motivation to truly understand what the real problem really is.

For instance, consider Donald J. Trump. Because say that fifty years ago you were writing a science fiction story about a culture that had become an Idiocracy. Now wouldn't such a person as Trump be a perfect manifestation of such a culture? Wouldn't he make the perfect President of such an imaginary nightmare?

Or, let me put it another way: Donald Trump isn't the problem. Donald Trump certainly isn't the solution. Donald Trump is nothing more than a symptom.

Because remember: *Everyone* is in the same clown car now. Including the cognitive elite. So that their so-called Progressive solutions make no more real sense than Donald Trump's do. Except, of course, to the cognitive elite. No, they are still strutting around in their Emperor's New Clothes, completely oblivious to their own pomposity. Although, to be fair, they, too, are not the cause, but only a symptom.

And you can certainly kid yourself all that you want that if we just got rid of Donald Trump then everything would be fine. And I completely agree that to think otherwise is really, really scary. But it's pointless for me to do this podcast unless I am honest. And so, yes, unfortunately the truth *is* really, really scary.

Because, no matter what happens politically, either way we're screwed. We're all stewing in this garbage. We can't vote our way out of this.

And that means that even if your political reforms were the most wonderful and well thought out political reforms ever, it wouldn't matter. Because it's the culture, stupid. And the culture is totally stupid.

That means that even if all the climate change problems were taken care of, even if carbon emissions got down to zero, even if all the rainforests were regrown, and even if all those cute animals were saved from extinction, it still wouldn't matter.

Because the culture would still be totally stupid.

And that means that even if Silicon Valley achieves infinite bandwidth, and even if they create amazingly successful futuristic mind/machine interfaces, and even if they come up with a way to extend all of our lifetimes to 300 years, it *still* wouldn't matter.

Because the culture would still be so friggin' totally stupid.

And, as I said, the way this works is that it doesn't spontaneously get more adult all of a sudden. Crazy Land doesn't get rational all by itself. No, it just keeps spiraling downwards. So that you're just going to get people watching some even more degraded version of the Kardashians. You're just going to have idiot leaders even more degraded than Donald Trump.

Trust me. It's our future.

And you don't need to tell me that there are still occasional movies or TV shows that are deep and insightful. And you don't need to tell me about the occasional politician or public figure who is thoughtful and sincere. Because I am well aware that they are out there. But I also know that they are the exceptions which prove the rule. And the rule is: What we are surrounded by is not even worthy of a halfway intelligent teenager of fifty years ago.

So let's stop all of this for a moment and let it all sink in. And let me take this moment to reiterate that I won't be spending the rest of these podcasts complaining about how dumb everything and everyone is. No: We're just setting the table here. The rest of this is going to be that enjoyable college course. Because the entire purpose of this podcast is to clearly explain to you how and why we got here. To go back hundreds of years and explain just how certain incredibly bad ideas got baked into what is referred to as Western culture. And if I actually thought that you were so far gone that you couldn't understand what I was saying, then there wouldn't be any point in me doing this, now would there? Because in fact we are not mentally deficient. In actuality, we don't have to be living this way.

What's more, in the end I'm going to be trying to show you that, lo and behold, when we get through with the science part we'll find that our human nature is a lot more altruistic and cooperative than what we have been generally taught. Further, that, as it were, we were meant to be positive. And that it is indeed at least possible to end up with a world of, if not yet peace and love, at least of hope and stability. That there really could be sunlight at the end of all this darkness.

But to get to that point... Well, like I said earlier, it's going to be a long, hard slog to try to convince you that much of what you believe to be true is actually quite wrong. Bonkers even. And it's going to take a lot of science, a lot of history, a lot of social science, and even some philosophy. Although, as mentioned, I'm not going to be academic or abstruse. I'll be minimizing the names and the dates and the math and the footnotes. But also definitely still attempting to not dumb it down.

After all, we've all had more than enough of that by now, haven't we?

So let's get to the next part. Namely, you're no doubt wondering by now: Who is this guy? And why should I be listening to him?

Okay, good questions. And this is the section which is a little awkward for me. Because I actually really hate the idea of self promotion. Even though that seems to be the only game in town these days. Plus my wife says that folks these days like to think that the people that they're listening to have back stories and personalities. (Oh, and, by the way, that is my wife Maureen singing the intro at the top of this.)

Anyway, here goes my attempt to make myself sound interesting and intelligent.

First of all, I live in the mountains of New Mexico. Which hopefully sounds charming and maybe even a little exotic. Second, I have a couple of degrees from, of all places, Yale University. And these degrees can best be described as in Social Psychology and Economics.

But I didn't go into the academic life. Partially this was because, once you get into graduate school you see first hand what particular clown cars academic departments can be. Mostly, though, it's because when I went back to college in the early 70s I lived in married student housing. And most everyone else who was there were grad students. And they were the dullest, most boring bunch of grinds that you could imagine.

Not that I'm saying that the academic world doesn't do any good work, or that there aren't any dedicated or interesting people who are part of it. But it's such an easy gig once you get it that, let's face it, no one is going to rock that boat. And even if they wanted to they couldn't, because everything they do is peer reviewed, and those peers certainly aren't going to give up all their wine and cheese parties.

What's more, that old ivory tower thing, the scholar being relatively poor and separate from the world thing, just doesn't exist any more. Which means that those at the top of the academic food chain, the tenured professors at Yale and Harvard and the like, are now pulling down serious bucks. More importantly, they are now part and parcel of the ruling elite. And what ruling elite in history has ever voluntarily given up its power?

The biggest reason why the academics aren't going to figure out what's really wrong with all of this, though, is that to do so requires a pretty broad knowledge of the science and the history and the social science, etc., that I was talking about. And anyone who wants to pursue a PhD has to get real

narrow and real deep right from the get go. So that nowadays when such a person tries to get outside their particular area of expertise, their understanding and insights into other disciplines are often laughably amateurish.

Whereas I, on the other hand...

Actually, I'm proud to confess to having been an omnivorous nerd my entire life. I really enjoy reading about Medieval history and the Cambrian explosion and the Turkish economy and everything in between. And I still have a half decent memory. Which means that I can bore you with five or ten minute extemporaneous blatherings about the Byzantine Emperor Justinian or 19th Century Utopian communities or the search for extrasolar planets or whatever.

Although having spent so much time studying all this extracurricular material means that I never really made the millions of dollars that a Yalie is supposed to make. Which means that I never got to sell a software company or the like, and I can't just hop on a plane and go to Uzbekistan whenever I feel like it.

Howsoever... I have been to Uzbekistan. And 199 other countries. Usually the hard way, traveling on buses and share taxis and the like. Because that's the fun way to do it. And it's also the way that you get to find out what's really going on. And by now the only places I haven't been to are basically war zones and tiny Pacific islands. Not that I have just been checking off countries on a list, either. Because I can also bore you with five or ten minute speeches on the history and culture of every single place that I've ever been.

But, besides being something cool to brag about, how does this factor into the podcast? Well, a large part of what I will be talking about will be hinging upon the question of what our true human nature really is. And, as I will try to show, modern science has a lot to say about that if we're not being blinded by our preexisting ideology. But a lot of it can also be figured out if we just go out there and try to actually pay attention as to how humans actually behave. Away from our way too over the top First World artificiality and away from our atomized postmodern existence. And what I have found is that there are indeed certain commonalities which seem to exist independently of culture. What's more, I have also found that, on the other hand, certain of the West's beloved so-called human rights really don't matter all that much to the real people walking around in the real rest of the world. Because, guess what? They've got much bigger problems and priorities.

Anyway, there's also a third aspect of me that probably enters into this. And that is that ever since 1968 I've been involved with yoga and meditation and Eastern thought and the like. Not that this

means that I'm claiming to be some sort of realized soul. Or that I'm going to be pushing some specific quote/unquote 'spiritual' bill of goods. But it does mean that, unlike many of the other social critics and futurists and science explainers who are out there, I'm also not going to be approaching all of this from an automatic point of view of atheism or of a cold meaningless Universe. And this also means that I am not assuming that the purpose of trying to turn this ship around is to somehow ensure a future of endless dopamine feedback loops. Or of some science fiction techno-utopia fantasy. Because if that were the meaningless case, if that were all that we had to look forward to, then we might as well all just drown in all of this stupidity.

But enough about me. Because it's time to stop with the introduction and start getting into the real stuff. Which we're going to do in the very next episode.

First, however, I'd like to make a couple of final comments.

Now I would like to hope that by my being rational and rigorous, and by my careful marshaling of the evidence, that you will therefore be readily convinced. But I fully realize that this would be naive.

And I will be going over this in greater detail in the upcoming episodes, but the truth is that although we all like to think of ourselves as masters of our thoughts, in fact very few of us have spent years up upon that mountain top contemplating first causes. The reality is that our beliefs are primarily a function of our upbringing, our education, our larger cultural surroundings, and our varying personalities. And these beliefs pervade our thoughts so much, and have wormed themselves so thoroughly into our brains, that even when the Truth is as blinding as Truth can get, well, we are often still blind to it.

So if you're coming at this from a skeptical direction, I thoroughly understand that. After all, a lot of what I am going to be discussing you may very well have never heard before. Therefore, all I ask for now is that you approach this with as open a mind as possible. And, of course, continually check to make sure that I am still being rational and rigorous.

Nor do I expect you to believe anything just because I said it. So if any of the evidence does sound strange or suspicious, do a little research yourself. For instance, Wikipedia is actually pretty accurate on most subjects. And it is good that it is. Because, as I will be pointing out, so much of popular history, and even popular science, can be way oversimplified. Or even outright wrong.

And one last note. If you go to the podcast's website, which is conveniently named dialitbackordie.com, you'll find that each episode has its own page. And on the bottom of that page is a link for you to get a PDF transcript of said episode. Which might be of help if you need to or want to go over any of the information that you have just heard.

Anyway, now it's really time to begin getting to that information. And I would certainly appreciate it if you decide to come along. In the meantime, though, thank you so much for so far having listened.