

EPISODE 17

THE WAY WE WERE

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 17 in my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. And once again this episode is going to be a little longer than usual.

Now when we left off last time we were at the year 1290. And next time we're going to continue our journey on into the modern era. Today, though, we're going to go over what I consider to be some of the most important insights of this podcast. Because we're going to sort of stop, look around, and try to understand what it was about Civilization which made is so civilized.

Okay. So far in this podcast I've been deliberately trying to limit the discussion to what is commonly referred to as 'Western' civilization. Today, though, we're going to expand things and look at the entire world. Because I'm certainly not the first person who has concluded that there is something intrinsically wrong with the West. It's actually a rather common theme. As I tried to explain in the beginning, though, when most authors try to critique the modern world, they are doing it from the very mindset that created the modern world in the first place. Therefore, when they try to place the blame on where we went wrong, they often fall into the same intellectual trap that those Soviet citizens did when they assumed that Marxist ideas must be more than obviously correct. So, too, do we assume that about Enlightenment ideas. Therefore, if the results aren't working out so well we conclude that the fault must lie almost anywhere else except with those ideas.. So that if almost unlimited freedom of commerce or sex or speech hasn't resulted in peace or happiness, then surely the answer is to have more such freedom.

And even when a social critic agrees that some fatal flaw must have been there all along, even from before the Enlightenment, they tend to speculate about some fatal flaw that is specific to the West. Maybe it was the rationalism of Descartes and his orderly Universe. Maybe it was the rationalism of Plato and the other Greeks. Maybe it was the repressiveness of Judeo-Christian thought.

Whatever the case, however, the implication is always that it is the *West* that went astray. Somehow other world civilizations all escaped whatever straitjacket that we are in. Somehow other world civilizations were gentler, more wholistic, more in tune with nature.

Well, first of all, if you define a 'civilization' as being a fairly advanced literate society with a developed and distinctive art and culture, etc., and if you leave out the Christian world, then there have only been a relatively small finite number of them. China, India, and the Arabs would be three major ones. Localized ones would include Japan, Indochina, Central Asia, and the Ottomans. (And obviously they have also all interacted to a greater or lesser extent.)

In all of these instances, though, I think that any of their citizens would have been highly insulted if you had told them that their society was primarily intuitive and not rational. Wherever they have arisen, civilizations have always defined themselves as superior to the barbarians outside the gates precisely because of their rational order.

Nor is there much of any evidence that Eastern civilizations were any more 'spiritual' than the West. Wars happened just as frequently. Hypocrisy and small 'm' materialism were just as prevalent. And of course there were great Chinese philosophers and great Hindu mystics. But it's also true that the Christian world has produced its fair share of both.

So were these other cultures really all that significantly different from ours? Well, there obviously have been vastly different stylistic manifestations of music, art, and poetry across time and space. But when you contemplate the essence of 'art' or 'music' the commonalities—rhythm, texture, balance—are clearly more important than the differences. Even with the world's vastly different languages, the study of linguistics has shown that there are similar underlying patterns. And I would suggest that—not only in terms of art or learning, but even extending to an understanding of the intrinsic purpose of life—it is possible to determine qualitative commonalities among *all* of the world's various civilizations.

Except for the results of the Age of Enlightenment, etc.

Because so far the theme has been that the foundational assumptions—the operating system, as it were—of the modern world are radically different from that of Western Europe before 1750. Now I would like to expand that to say that these assumptions are also radically different from and utterly unlike the outlook of *every other civilization that has ever existed*.

Both in the rest of the world and throughout the rest of history.

Although for now it is not my intent to advocate for what I have been calling the 'classical' point

of view. Instead I merely want to outline what that alternative system of beliefs was. Hopefully, even if you are absolutely convinced that the modern way is the right way and the superior way, you will at least gain an understanding as to how everyone in every civilization before this modern one thought. And therefore why every one of those people would have thought that our world was out of kilter, dangerous, even evil.

So here goes:

I'll begin with the assumption that was perhaps the most important to non-modern societies and the one which also sounds the most alien to our secular ears. It is this: **This everyday world that we live in is not the ultimate reality.**

This idea is so out of fashion today that even the vast majority of Christian churches, including supposedly fundamentalist ones, hardly ever mention Heaven or the afterlife. Which is particularly strange in that from its very beginning the whole religion of Christianity was built upon the belief that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven, that a final judgment was coming momentarily, and that the eternity we will spend in Heaven or Hell was infinitely more important than our short lifetimes here on Earth. But nowadays, even though lip service is still paid to the afterlife, the emphasis is upon the world we live in. And this is true whether it is the earnest do-goodism of the liberal sects or the ersatz self-help ministrations or the 'prosperity gospel' of the mega-churches.

This is though even as recently as 1950 preachers would regularly thunder about sinners' eternal damnation in Hell. In 1850 it was still common for the majority of educated, worldly men to ponder the fate of their souls. Up until at least 1600 all learning and wisdom in the West was predicated upon the inherent transience of life and the shallowness of worldly pleasures. For instance, the great 17th Century poet John Donne famously slept in a coffin so that he could constantly be reminded of this.

Nor was such an outlook narrowly confined to Christianity. Islam also saw earthly existence as merely a prelude to a Judgment and an Afterlife. If anything, what with its prohibition of alcohol consumption, its yearly month long fast, and its requirement of ritualistic prayer five times a day, Islam held an even dimmer view than the Christian world did about the joys of daily life.

Hinduism went even further. It didn't credit the 'physical plane' with any reality at all. Rather our life here on Earth was seen as nothing more than a somewhat complicated dream state that we have foolishly not awakened from. Further, to the extent that we continue in our ignorance, Hinduism states that we will endlessly be reincarnated into slightly different dreamscapes. This takes the inherent

meaninglessness of day to day existence to a whole new level.

Buddhism also rests upon this premise. Its major theological difference with Hinduism is that whereas Hinduism concludes that the ultimate reality is one of bliss and consciousness, most Buddhists believe that Nirvana is actually nothingness. (Of course, defining 'nothingness' has always been a little bit tricky... But that's for another podcast.) Anyway, to Buddhists that nothingness is far more 'real' than this fake worldly existence of pain and continually thwarted desire.

And when you consider just how much over the past two thousand years virtually every corner of the 'civilized' world has been absorbed into at least one of these four major world religions, it would be hard to argue against the idea that—absent Enlightenment thinking—the world we live in was seen as anything other than at best a staging ground for some higher reality.

Of course, one can still argue. For instance, take the Romans. As I just went over in Episode 14, the historical cliché that Romans were great at soldiering and civil engineering, but not all that deep or religious, is a pretty accurate one.

But as I also pointed out, the Romans may have been the dominant force in the ancient world, but theirs wasn't the dominant culture. Most of the people in the empire ascribed to one or more religions which preached of another, higher existence. Moreover, Rome's most prized ideal was Civic Virtue, which held that service to the State was far superior, and therefore more inherently real, than the mere hustling and grubbing for worldly success. Thus, when generals rode their chariots in parades of triumph, there would always be a slave standing next to them and whispering in their ear, 'This, too, shall pass'.

Or consider the Japanese culture. We may think of classical Japan as a place of Zen gardens and Shinto shrines, but cultural historians point out that the traditional Japanese were actually among the least innately religious of any advanced society that has existed. Once again, though, we see the concept of virtue raised to a level seldom seen in any other country. That a breach of honor should be cause for ritualistic suicide is pretty clear evidence that an almost mystical Platonic ideal of 'true living' was considered much more important than life itself.

Finally, if you're still trying to come up with exceptions, you might say that I am being too limiting in my definition of 'civilization'. What about the ancient Egyptians, the Mayans, the Inca? But even a cursory examination of these other cultures would conclude that they are best known for their religious beliefs. All those mummies and tombs were because the afterlife was considered more important than the present one. More broadly, anthropologists now know that every culture which has

ever existed which has been more complex than the most basic hunter/gatherers has had religion of some sort. Which means that everyone everywhere in the history of the world always had thought that what the gods wanted was way more important than what they wanted. Which means that the world of the gods was necessarily of a higher reality than theirs. Even the Australian aborigines conceived of the world they lived in as having been created out of Dreamtime.

One can speculate upon several reasons why all of these disparate cultures would conclude that events outside this world were more important than those within it. But a major one would no doubt be the undeniable fact that back then people were all constantly reminded of the mortality which is the human condition. After all, on average half of all children would die before their fifth birthday. Extended families lived together, so that everyone would have had first hand experiences of the deaths of parents and grandparents. The specters of war, disease, and famine were always close at hand. The evanescence of life on this planet was always clear, so that even those cultures which didn't have a distinct idea of the afterlife could still conclude that for a satisfying Meaning to exist it had to be outside the confines of life and death.

To those of us with a modern mind it is no doubt difficult to understand just how radically different it is to have a world view which denies the ultimate reality of this life as we know it. Some of those differences will present themselves as we go along. For right now I would like to just briefly examine a question that was central to the creation of Enlightenment thinking, and which is still often posed today. Namely: Why does God do bad things to good people? Why does He allow suffering?

This is by no means a new problem. The Book of Job, completed in around the years 400-300 BC, addressed the same topic. But it is not the sort of question that a wise person in the pre-modern era would have had that much trouble with. To a Hindu, any suffering is a result of your own past desires and actions, your karma. To a Christian suffering is a test of your faith. To a Muslim it is a way to help us submit to the will of Allah. A Buddhist would say that pleasure and pain are just flip sides to the same coin, so stop complaining. To all of them all worldly suffering would be just seemingly apparent, because it is not ultimately real. Therefore to all of them the question of 'God allowing evil' would have been a non-starter.

And if pressed on this, the wise might well have rhetorically responded, 'Why on Earth does your ego assume in the first place that the Universe just exists in order to fulfill your particular desires?'

Again, I am not at the moment advocating for this position. There has always been at least a small minority in every culture which has believed that there is nothing above or beyond this world that

we have found ourselves in. And for the sake of this discussion it is certainly possible that the modern view—namely, that all of the religious and quasi-religious beliefs of the past were only so much wishful thinking so as to cover up existential despair—is correct.

Nor—again—do I mean to suggest that cultures before ours were wonderful paradises where everyone spent their time in prayer, meditation, and praising of the Lord. Far, far from it. Anyone who has read any amount of history knows otherwise.

But it is extremely important for you to understand that before the Enlightenment virtually every wise or educated person everywhere believed (at least in theory) that the pleasures of this world were intrinsically trivial.

A second commonality to every other culture in the world save ours would be the belief in **the reality of natural moral law**.

As I've already mentioned, many (if not most) 18th Century philosophers believed very strongly in the existence of natural moral law. After all, the thinking went, if the natural sciences had been so successful in ferreting out physical laws, surely the correct moral laws could also be found. Indeed, Jefferson's statement of 'We hold these truths to be self evident...' was about as strong a statement of belief in natural moral law as possible.

I've also already noted that our modern presentation of the Enlightenment is not necessarily what was thought back then, and that this is because we currently know those thoughts as processed through the brains of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. One could also argue that, given some of the other contradictory assumptions held in the Enlightenment, it would have been only a matter of time before the belief in natural moral law—like the belief in God before it—fell away.

Whatever the case, the fact remains that in the present day the idea that moral law can somehow exist independently of human mind or human culture seems quaint at best. After all, all sorts of behaviors—especially sexual ones—which were considered highly immoral a hundred years ago are now considered perfectly acceptable. The concept of moral relativism has gone from being an interesting philosophical debate into becoming a mainstream idea. And although many would be uncomfortable with this characterization, in effect our 21st Century minds deem as moral any conclusion which has been voted upon democratically.

It goes further. Modern citizens are each supposed to have their own set of morals; it would sound totalitarian to our ears to suggest otherwise. Even the Catholic Church—the authority of which

was so hated by those Enlightenment thinkers—has to meekly accept that its Western followers pick and choose which of its moral teachings they wish to follow.

But it wasn't always like this. And, again, I'm not limiting the discussion to the West. You would be hard pressed to find a culture anywhere throughout history which did not have a strict moral code which it expected all of its citizens to follow. *From which there was no opting out.* Further, this code was universally seen to be in harmony with nature itself.

This held true even if there had been a specific person behind the code. For instance, for the past 2500 years China has followed the ethical truths enunciated by Confucius (and as explained by his disciple Mencius). But Confucius was honored not for his brilliance in inventing a system of morals out of the blue. Rather it was for his wisdom in supposedly discerning them from Nature itself.

Granted, the ancient Hebrews believed that Jehovah had personally dictated the Ten Commandments and all of the laws of the Torah. But the Apostle Paul boldly declared that said laws did not apply to Gentiles. So that to a large extent Christian morality also ended up finding its justification in 'nature'. And, interestingly, although a Christian scholar in Medieval Paris (or a Muslim scholar in Baghdad) would have found much that was alien about Eastern thought, and much to argue about theologically with it, still they would have been much more in sync with Confucian morals than we in the present are.

Because although each culture had its own creation/foundation myth, and each culture reached its moralistic conclusions largely separately from one another, their moral codes ended up being pretty similar. Critical concepts were: Honesty. Integrity. A sense of fairness and justice. Respect for authority. Obedience to matrimonial laws and customs. Protection of the young, old, and infirm. In fact, it is difficult to think of any organized group of people which we label as civilized that did not hold such standards as central to their existence.

Unfortunately, of course, *nature* is one of those words that we use which has a number of meanings, some of which end up contradicting each other. I have just been using it as 'the ideal state of existence', as in the idea of living in harmony with Nature. And it is this understanding which naturally underlies the concept of 'natural law'.

But the word 'natural' can also refer to something quite different, namely to behavior which just naturally occurs, such as a cat playing with a ball of string or a dog chasing a stick. Thus, for instance, philosophers could legitimately pose the question: Is man naturally lazy or naturally hard working? But this would have had a different meaning from asking: Is it laziness or hard work which is more in

harmony with Nature?

In this context, the conclusion from Confucius to the Buddha to Aristotle to the Apostle Paul was that the nature of man was that he had various selfish appetites—such as Lust, Anger, Greed, etc.—which by their very nature could never be satisfied. It followed then that if men were allowed to act naturally, they would destroy society by the never ending conflicts which their never ending passions would always produce.

Which is why, if you want to take the 'natural law' concept and strip it down to one essential idea, it would probably be this: **Restrain Yourself**. For although morality was seen to be inextricably linked in some way to Nature, at the same time it was recognized that when most men acted naturally they also acted immorally.

Or to put it another way, if men naturally acted morally, then there would be no need for wise men to discern morality from Nature.

Self control thus became the most prized virtue in classical societies. We may imagine that outside of the Christian realm Dionysian orgies were the rule, but the reality was quite different. Those who could not control their tongue, their temper, their alcoholic intake or their sexual desires were universally looked down upon by polite society. In fact, this ideal of strong self-discipline was perhaps the critical way that civilized people defined themselves as being civilized and as therefore different from the barbarians.

But in their own way even so-called uncivilized peoples also prized this virtue. There are many instances of barbarian rulers who were laughed at as being effeminate sissies for spending too much time with their concubines. Even the insanely bloodthirsty Aztecs were extremely strict as regarding the purity of their womenfolk. And we may blanch at the extreme tortures that many Native American tribes inflicted on each others' captives. But each side recognized that the whole point in this was to see who was so self-disciplined that they could suffer the most without offering up a whimper of complaint. In a strange way the person who died stoically was perceived as the one who had actually 'won'.

There is one final observation to make about cross-cultural *civilized* natural moral law. This is that self control in and of itself was not sufficient. There also had to be a certain restraint in the restraint. That is to say, from Buddha's Middle Way to Aristotle's Golden Mean, it was generally recognized that the highest, most meaningful life was one of moderation.

And now we are ready for the third commonality. And this is how the wise in all civilizations other than our own defined true happiness.

I've already pointed out that to Jeremy Bentham societal happiness had to do with the greatest good for the greatest number, a formulation which superficially at least sounds plausible. The difficulty, of course, was then in defining what 'good' meant. You'll recall that Bentham's answer was that the definition of 'good' was left up to each individual. As he put it: 'Push-pin is as good as poetry'. The 'good' of playing solitaire on your computer was the same as the 'good' of you climbing a mountain or the 'good' of your child graduating from college.

So I'm guessing that most of you would not find such a definition all that intuitively appealing or satisfactory.

So that therefore you probably wouldn't be surprised to find out that others had long ago come up with a somewhat more sophisticated answer.

And this was that **true happiness comes from self-abnegation.**

Not that anyone necessarily put it in quite those terms. And even right now you might not be sure of what 'self-abnegation' means. So let's start the discussion with a slight digression.

When you think about it, once we set aside the actual processes of living, such as sleeping and eating, there seem to be only four categories as to how we can spend out time: Working, Fighting, Playing, and absorption in the 'Higher Pursuits'. Of these, Working is probably easiest to understand: It's what we do to ensure that those processes of living can continue to be carried out. And though there is some debate over how much leisure time earlier humans had, in general it has been assumed that for most of history the vast majority of people spent the vast majority of their waking lives working.

Fighting might not be such an obvious 'need'. But you should be aware that even as recently as the outbreak of World War One, millions of men eagerly enlisted so that they might experience the glory of battle. Certainly throughout the rest of history a vast majority of the world's population saw the soldier's life as one of nobility and greatness. And anthropologists will tell you that fighting other groups is all too often the main outcome of men having time on their hands.

Playing can refer to any and all of the many ways in which we divert ourselves when we are not either working or fighting. 'Divert' is the operative word here, because when we consider what all play seems to have in common—whether it is engaging in sports or watching TV or going to parties—is that such behavior is diverting our attention from the 'real' world, i.e. the one which is usually absorbed

with life processes, working, or fighting. Prior to the 18th Century, whether viewed by a Greek philosopher, a Hindu yogi, or a Medieval monk, Playing was almost always seen as by far the most trivial way to spend one's time.

The most meaningful way was universally thought to be that absorption in those Higher Pursuits.

But before I try to describe the list of what this term includes, it is perhaps necessary to properly define another word: Self. For just as the word 'nature' can describe several qualitatively different and even conflicting ideas, so too the word 'self' can be applied to quite opposite concepts.

Today the word is used in psychology to refer to what we would also call our complete and individualized personality. There is also the common usage of acknowledging person-hood, as in 'me, myself, & I.' But there is a third meaning, which is when the word 'self' is synonymous with what we could also call the soul. That is to say, that it is that part of our being or consciousness which exists independently of our individualized personality. Thus Socrates' famous dictum of 'Man, know Thyself'. Or the idea in eastern thought that meditation on the void within will reveal the true Self.

Note that for the purposes of this discussion it is not necessary that you believe that such a thing as a soul exists. After all, for instance, Zen Buddhism doesn't believe in God or souls, yet it reaches the same conclusions about the need to rid oneself of personal self or ego. Although all the same you should know that before the 18th Century virtually everybody in every civilization extant did believe that souls existed. And that seeking contact with one's soul was considered the best possible use of one's time. And although probably no one in the classical world ever put it in quite this way, this was best accomplished through those Higher Pursuits. One came to know One's Self (as in soul) through the abnegation of the self (as in personality).

Immersion in philosophy or prayer and meditation or religious devotion would therefore all qualify as higher pursuits. So would suppression of the individual ego by selflessly serving the greater good, whether in feeding the poor or by protecting the community.

But let's broaden the idea and suggest that the term 'higher pursuits' covers every meaningful subject which exists independently of anyone's personal ego. Considered in this light, then, math, the natural sciences, logic, and an adherence to a legal system were all higher pursuits. Further, to the extent that one's music, dance, poetry, or whatever transcended the realm of the individual and was perceived as universal, then such art was a higher pursuit. For that matter, 'higher pursuit' could even be expanded to include participation in all those ceremonial functions which transcended the

individual, whether it was in one's personal marriage or in the coronation of a king.

In fact, another good ad hoc definition of 'civilization' could well be any culture which believes in the existence of higher pursuits. And that therefore in the pre-modern world that civilization was considered best which promoted the pursuit of those higher pursuits the most.

Then there's perhaps the highest higher pursuit of all. And this is what we might call True Love. In the last episode I discussed chivalry and its connection to Platonic love and the like. The idea was that one could take normal human attraction between the sexes and refine this and elevate it to a love which transcended the physical.

Of course, transcendental love has also always been associated with mysticism and the ultimate stated goal of most religious preachers. 'God is love' and all that. But how and who is God always referred to as? Thou. The Other. Definitely not 'I', the personality. So that we can see that, whether a person was a hopeless romantic or a religious devotee, some of the highest ideals which were held up in classical societies had to do with people striving to rid themselves of that small 's' personal self.

To summarize then: In the time before 1750, at least among the wise, there was a worldwide consensus about what constituted true happiness. Whether one was a scientist, a composer, a mystic or a philosopher, it all came down to somehow getting above and/or beyond that strange blend of quirks and desires which constitute the personalities of each and every one of us.

Finally, there is a fourth commonality which was believed by every civilization and culture before ours. In fact, it was so assumed to be factually true that very few people, if any, ever gave it a conscious thought. Or felt the need to declare it as some sort of deep insight.

It is this: **Men and women are qualitatively different beings.**

This assumption was profoundly important for several reasons. For one thing, when philosophers sat around discussing the 'nature of man', they didn't include women in the conversation because it was obvious to them that the nature of women was fundamentally different. In similar fashion, women were excluded from politics not because anyone wanted to hold them back, but because it was common knowledge that they could have cared less about taxation rates or about who was leading whom into battle. Indeed, the idea of, for instance, a woman being courageous in battle would have seemed absurd to both men and women alike. Even in clashes with warlike barbarian no one had ever experienced aggressive women. An Amazon was therefore just as much of a mythical creature as was a Centaur or a Siren.

Understand that the men in classical societies who thought this—as opposed to the Enlightenment thinkers who are responsible for our modern conceptions—almost always had close, intimate everyday experiences with their wives, mothers, and children. They weren't spinning some theory. They were describing the world that they actually experienced.

And you would also be hard pressed to find any women who lived in classical societies who didn't believe that their nature was intrinsically different from men. Or who had any desire to be part of the world of warfare or of winner-take-all status competitions.

But it would be very unfair to argue that men therefore thought of women as *inferior*. After all, to the extent that 'superior' and 'inferior' mean 'greater' and 'lesser', then these are basically quantitative adjectives. Whereas the whole point of the matter was that maleness and femaleness were inherently different *qualities*. And while it is true that the original tribal Jewish god Jehovah was depicted as purely masculine, almost every other religious conception which arose also had many gods and principles which were critically and essentially female. In short, although I would agree that woman's lot in many less advanced cultures was relatively grim by modern standards, it's also true that in the more sophisticated civilizations that I have been discussing there was a deep understanding that the feminine sphere of influence was vitally important and easily just as meaningful as that of the male.

In fact, as we shall see, it was generally acknowledged that the entire point of civilization was the protection of and elevation of the female and of the feminine principle.

Further it was assumed that the masculine and the feminine were totally interdependent. One could not exist without the other. And this is perhaps best seen in the well known Chinese symbol for the yin (female principle) and the yang (male principle). Because the Chinese did not see the feminine as the obverse or the reverse or the opposite of the masculine. This is why there is that squiggly line in the middle of the yin/yang, and not a straight one. For it is not a quantitative difference, such as +3 and -3, which is being referred to. They did not think that when you combined the masculine and the feminine you got zero.

Rather you got one.

This understanding that male consciousness and female consciousness, though different, were necessarily equal, can be found in the marriage ceremonies of all the major religions. In them women were not exhorted to behave assertively, as men commonly do. Nor were men told to behave like women. The whole ideal was for these two different entities, with quite different outlooks and temperaments, to somehow form a complete union which transcended each individual.

An important semi-mystical corollary followed from this. Although just about every civilization had some sort of vision of a 'realized soul', for all practical purposes it was assumed that for most of us we would each be inevitably incomplete, if for no other reason than the male can never truly 'know' the female, nor the female the male. In other words, *by definition* the self (meaning the individual personality) could never be complete. By definition the two would need to complement one another.

Anyway—to reiterate—you need not believe any of the beliefs outlined in this chapter. At this point I'm not trying to convert you.

But you do need to know that virtually everyone in every civilization before the Enlightenment and modernity *did* believe these things. They certainly might not have always used the same terms that I have. But I am fairly confident that if you go back and study the belief systems of all of those various cultures, you will not find much of anything that contradicts what I have said.

Of course, (once again) I am not in the slightest way pretending that the actual day to day human behavior which took place around the world prior to the modern era in any way fully lived up to the precepts of the Buddha or Confucius or Aristotle or whomever. And anyway it would be extremely difficult methodologically to try to figure out if the typical person of 1290 was morally superior or inferior to, or 'happier' than, the typical person of 1990.

But consider this hypothetical:

Suppose there is one society where everyone grows up with the ideal and the vision and the goal of winning an Olympic gold medal constantly before them. And suppose that there is another one in which all that is asked of anyone is to sit around on their sofa, watch television, and stuff their face with snack foods. Obviously in each society only a tiny handful of people will ever actually take part in an Olympics, let alone win any sort of Olympic medal. But it does make a certain common sense that average physical fitness would be higher in the first society.

So let's quickly review and slightly rephrase the four basic 'classical' assumptions that I have outlined:

1. There absolutely exists a higher reality that one should aspire to.
2. There also exists a moral law which is superior to you, which is much more important than you, and to which you must submit.

3. The key to happiness is losing yourself in something that is not a function of your personality.
4. Male and female are two halves of a larger, even perhaps mystical, whole.

And it doesn't matter to me one bit whether you believe or don't believe any or all of these foundational assumptions.

But please do try to keep them in mind as we continue upon our quick journey through History.

Anyway, let's go back now to that year 1290. Because the first chapters in the West's drifting away from this Classical Civilization are about to begin. And, once again, it's going to turn out that what we've all been taught ain't necessarily so.

Big surprise there, though, right?

In the meantime, though, thanks again once more for so far, and so patiently, having listened.