

EPISODE 3

GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz, and this is Episode number 3 of my podcast Dial it Back Or Die. In this episode we're going to be talking about foundational assumptions, and about just how central they are, and just how important they are, not only to our entire thought process, but even to our sense of being.

Serious stuff. After all, the foundation is what you build the house upon. And if the foundation is rotten...

And although a lot of what I'll be going over may well seem like dry logic and dry philosophy that might on the surface not seem so relevant to real life in the real world, I would urge you to pay close attention. Because at the end of all this, after all of these episodes, I intend to prove to you that virtually all of our problems and debates of today, from transgender rights to race relations to the fraying apart of society, all inevitably result from the adoption of the foundational assumptions which the ideology of liberal democracy assumed. Inevitably.

But that's for the future. In the meantime, let's start off with something light. Like the fact that here in the United States we all drive on the right hand side of the road. Now I've never even heard the most out there libertarian ever claim that as sovereign individuals we should be free to drive on whatever side of the road we want to. Because although this position is actually logical from the point of view of 'personal freedom', thankfully nobody's mind ever goes there. Instead all 300 million plus of us instinctively feel that the right side is 'right' and the left side is 'wrong'.

But although in the end one of the central points of this whole podcast will be to show just how much of human behavior does stem from evolution, is pre-programmed in us, as it were, it is also true that certain things, such as which side of the road we drive on, are arbitrary. It is just as logical, it makes just as much sense, for everyone to drive on the left hand side. And England, Australia, Japan, among many others, do indeed do just that.

But most of us Americans, when we visit such countries, feel at least a little queasy about the

whole thing. After all, no matter how logical it is that the matter is arbitrary, we still feel that left is just wrong. And many of us are actually scared at the idea of renting a car and attempting to drive around in such 'madness'.

Okay, here's another example. As you may already be aware, there are no absolute directions in space. It's just a great big cosmos in every direction. So the fact that we have assigned 'North' to the North Pole is completely arbitrary. Logically, and what no doubt would have happened if civilization had first arisen in South Africa or Argentina, is that we could have assigned the important direction 'North' to Antarctica. And then all of our globes would today be upside down, with Alaska in the deep, deep Southern Hemisphere. Mathematically and geometrically, it would be exactly the same thing. And the rest of the cosmos wouldn't have cared one bit. Yet the image that I am creating for your mind I am sure feels really weird and also, in a fundamental way, just *wrong*.

Which brings us to an incredibly important observation, one first made by Herodotus, an ancient Greek who is generally recognized as the world's first historian. He noted the strange fact that every society in the world, bar exception, thought that its beliefs and behaviors were the correct ones, and that all other beliefs and behaviors were therefore at fault.

And things haven't changed that much in the 2500 years since then. It seems almost like it's part of our DNA that this is the way that our brains work.

Now upon hearing this you may well immediately see how this observation might be true for tribesmen in the Amazon rainforest or for the Greeks at the time of Herodotus. You might also see how this is true for all those small town red state Americans who are still clinging to their God and their guns. But you might well take exception as to you, yourself. After all, you are sophisticated. You are modern. Your beliefs have been wrung through the wringer of logic and, more importantly, of science. You hold to universal human values and basic human rights.

To which I say: Balderdash. Because you yourself have not spent years on a mountain top, laboriously going back to first principles in your mind and independently proving logical laws and theorems. Because we may all like to think that the thoughts that we have are all 'ours', but let's face it, although true mental independence is theoretically possible, in reality we are all almost totally shaped by the thoughts and ideas which are explicitly, and much more importantly, implicitly, imparted to us from our larger society.

And that is just bare naked reality. And unless you are prepared to recognize that reality, and to at least admit to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, you have been hoodwinked into believing a

bunch of bogus stuff, then you're not going to get a lot out of the rest of this podcast.

And how serious is the problem that Herodotus first noted? Let me illustrate it with this example: If you had grown up in Charleston, South Carolina, around 1840, then you, yes you, would have been 100% behind the idea of slavery.

Now your mind, just like my mind, is probably going to absolutely rebel at such an idea. No, of course *you* would have been the lonely voice of opposition! The idea of slavery is so filthy, so repugnant, that you would never, ever agree to it.

Well, keep dreaming. Because a whole lot of social psychology research says that this wouldn't have been the case. And the historical record definitely shows that it wasn't the case. Sure, there was a spectrum of opinion that went from saying that slavery was a necessary evil all the way to saying that it was a wonderful, positive good. But virtually each and every South Carolinian stood by their state and stood by their system of slavery. And you would have been one of them.

Now I use this example for two reasons. The first is to puncture your balloon of thinking that somehow you are immune from what we might call the belief system effects which have affected every other human since the beginning of history. And the second is to lead into the point that, as opposed to the arbitrary nature of which side of the road we drive on, having a foundational assumption of slavery is indeed essentially evil and wrong. If nothing else, having a system where some people own other people probably corrupts the master even more than the slave. Even if you the slave owner are yourself trying to be the most moral, Christian person possible. Because the foundational assumption itself goes totally against all the rest of Christian morality.

Now remember that, outside of their self-described 'peculiar institution' of slavery, South Carolinians were thoroughly normal human beings; Some were bad, some were good, most were in between. Nor did they consciously start slavery themselves. For both historical and economic reasons it was already baked into the system which they grew up in. It was the only system they knew.

But if you get nothing else out of this episode, just remember that bad foundational assumptions can have really terrible real life consequences.

Because this brings us to a point that has perhaps been lurking somewhere in your mind as you've been listening to me. Namely, it no doubt on a fundamental level sounds pretty far-fetched to you for me to claim that somehow we are all unknowing followers of some unnamed 'ism' that no one has ever told us about. What's no doubt even more preposterous is the thought that our incredibly

interrelated, technologically advanced Western world of today is any kind of direct result of the musings of eighteenth century or nineteenth century philosophers and ideologues.

What makes it even more difficult in the modern world, though, is that we also think that such an incredibly complex civilization couldn't exist unless it was solidly based upon science and reason. That therefore all of our beliefs must also somehow be based upon science. That, moreover, these beliefs must also have been somehow confirmed by experimental science.

But consider this: *Every* 'Ism' of the past couple of centuries—whether successful or not—has thought of itself as the logical end product of Science and Reason. As we shall see, Marxists were utterly convinced that their system had been scientifically proven. Even the Nazis saw themselves as noble servants of Science.

And we'll deal with all the science later. But right now I'd like to examine some of the aspects of reason that you might not be aware of.

Now very often you will hear people who identify themselves as atheists say that what they believe in is Reason. As if Reason could somehow exist independently of some previous assumptions that we're assuming. Which, as anyone who has taken Philosophy 101, or even Logic 101 can tell you, it can't. By definition.

For instance, did you know that it's impossible to prove that $1 + 1 = 2$?

Think about it. Sure, you can *demonstrate* that $1 + 1 = 2$. You can demonstrate it over and over again. And then you can demonstrate it some more. But a *demonstration* is not a **proof**.

That's because by definition a *proof* involves the successful logical manipulation of an initial set of assumptions and/or other prior proofs which had been obtained from those assumptions.

As an illustration, you might remember from geometry that when you started out you were presented with a set of postulates or assumptions. For instance, 'Two parallel lines will never meet'. It goes without saying that you can never follow those lines to infinity, so you just had to *assume* that this was the case. Or remember how when you started algebra there were a set of axioms (ie assumptions), such as $1 + 2 = 2 + 1$? It may have seemed confusing or unnecessary at the time, since these ideas seem so 'obvious'. But the observation that they are in the end nothing but assumptions is not trivial.

Because we can't reason about something unless we have something to reason with. Reason, after all, is not ideological or theological. It's just logical. It's a process of drawing conclusions from some initial assumptions. So, again, by definition you can't have any form of organized knowledge

which is not based upon a set of assumptions.

Okay, you might respond. But the assumptions behind geometry and algebra are, um, reasonable. Besides, it wouldn't work out all that well if we tried alternate assumptions such as '1 + 1 = 3' or 'two parallel lines will meet at some point'. We assume these assumptions because that's the only way that the system can function.

But the point I am making about the need for assumptions in math also applies to every other realm where reason is used. Let's go back to ancient Greece and take the example of a basic syllogism: If all philosophers are men, and Plato is a philosopher, then Plato is a man. All fine and logical, but you'll notice that it starts with an assumption. Namely, that all philosophers are men.

But now we're descending from the rarefied world of mathematics and logic, and down to the real world of everyday experience. Because in order to make that assumption someone had to look around, notice that every single philosopher that they saw was a man, and then *induce* that every other philosopher must also be a man. The rest of the syllogism was *deductive*, but you couldn't have gone anywhere with it unless you had a start that was *inductive*.

We have a common sense term for this process of induction, and that term is 'common sense'. Because it is natural for the brain to try and find patterns in the world it moves through, induce from those patterns various assumptions, and then to use rationality to successfully plan for the future. And (theoretically at least) in a well functioning brain a new piece of evidence—such as, for example, seeing a woman philosopher—will cause it to go back, change the basic assumption, and then proceed from there.

Now let's take this common sense approach, make it much more careful, precise, objective, and experimental, change the word 'assumption' to 'hypothesis', and change the phrase 'common sense' to 'science'. Now we are describing the scientific method. As I will explain later, this is basically what some Franciscan monks figured out and instituted around the middle of the 13th Century. And this is the process through which the secrets and laws of the natural world were discovered and the wealth and wonder of today became realized.

So far so good. We've very briefly covered logic, math, and the physical sciences, and up to now nobody—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Atheist, Marxist, Nazi—would argue with anything. Assumptions, inductions, deductions, the scientific method, they work the same under any religion or ideology. A (mostly) Christian nation such as the U.S. built an atomic bomb. So did the Communist Soviet Union. So did Islamic Pakistan. The physics involved didn't vary.

But of course this podcast isn't just about the beauty or history of math and science. Its purpose is to awaken you to the perils of an out of control, wrong ideology. Because religions and ideologies, like anything and everything else, are also based on a set of assumptions. And the way that those assumptions are arrived at is in no way as neat and clean as what underlies mathematics and the scientific method.

For first let me make clear (no matter how much a religious or ideological person might object) that both religions and ideologies are in the same category, since they each comprise of a set of foundational beliefs and the conclusions that are reasoned from those beliefs. The only difference between the two is that a religion posits the existence of a God and an ideology is at best agnostic on the subject.

(Or you could be sardonic and say that ideologies are simply religions for philosophical Materialists.)

Let me make this point another way. No ideology that has ever been invented is any more 'scientific' than any religion. It's true that the founder of a religion will usually claim divine inspiration, which the founder of an ideology will not. But the ideas behind any ideology are *the founder's* ideas. *His* musings. No matter how much Marxists came to believe that Marxism was scientific, there were in fact absolutely no scientific studies or observations which underlay the creation of Marxism.

And there were no scientific studies or observations which underlay the creation of liberal democracy, either.

None. Zero. Zilch. Liberal democracy was all built upon a superstructure of beliefs. Not reason. Not science. Ideological beliefs. And I would really like you to contemplate this for a moment.

Okay. Now let me try to clear up something else. When I talk about 'religious beliefs', you may well assume that I am referring to such ideas as 'Jesus walked on water', or 'Mohammed was the last prophet'. But let's be real. Because obviously whether or not you believe that Jesus miraculously multiplied loaves and fishes or Mohammed flew to the moon makes absolutely no difference in baking bread or in going to the moon ourselves.

So from now on I am going to be making a basic distinction between articles of belief, such as the aforementioned, and articles of faith, which are the true foundational assumptions of a religion. For it is these foundational assumptions, not belief of the stories in the Bible or the Koran, which are

actually what generate the superstructure of culture and philosophy, ethics and morality, in a Christian or Muslim society or any other religious society.

For instance, one foundational assumption of Christianity is the acceptance of Original Sin, the idea that there need be no other cause for our bad behavior other than our bad desires. Now you can certainly argue over the validity of that idea. But I think that you will agree that the nature of that 'belief' is qualitatively different from the nature of the belief that Methuselah lived for 969 years.

Now if you are a committed Christian, you might be taken aback to think of the doctrine of Original Sin as just an assumption. To you it may seem as an obvious truth and/or as an article of faith. But try to think of 'assumption' as just another word for 'faith'. After all, we have *faith* that $1 + 1$ will equal 2 tomorrow. We have *faith* that those two parallel lines will never meet. We have faith in the existence of an objective outside reality. And any full blown schizophrenic can tell you that such faith is not by any means automatic.

On the other hand, if you are of the secular frame of mind, you will probably readily agree that Original Sin is an assumption. You might well go further and say that it is 'just' a belief. And you might even be offended that I would equate a postulate of geometry with a religious supposition.

But remember that, no matter how much it might seem to you that they are, the beliefs that underlie your secular framework are not principles of mathematics, either. Nor, as I have just pointed out, are they in any way the result of scientific inquiry. If you think that they are truths, that's because you have been brought up to believe that they are. But that means that you are no different than the Christians of the 11th Century.

You, like they, have taken everything on faith.

What's worse, those Christians at least were under the impression that God had told somebody to write down the things that they believed. The 18th Century men who came up with the things that you believe never claimed to be anything other than regular participants in humanity like you and me. Except, of course, that they were wearing funny wigs, snorting gobs of tobacco, drinking fifteen cups of strong coffee a day, and, as we shall see, never having any kind of real and/or healthy relationships with anyone of the female sex.

Anyway, whatever your persuasion, I trust that we have established by now that anyone and everyone, including you and me, explicitly or implicitly is working off of some set of assumptions. Even if we think our particular set of assumptions aren't assumptions, they still are. Without getting into epistemology or any of the other arcane branches of philosophy, understand that the mind cannot

work any other way. You can't draw any conclusions unless somewhere back there you had assumptions.

Rationality cannot operate in a vacuum.

Fine. Enough already. Because I've also already pointed out that the process of baking bread is the same whether you are a Baptist or an Atheist. What actual difference do belief systems make in everyday reality? Especially when most of us aren't philosophers or ideologues. We're just trying to make a living, raise a family, etc., etc., etc.

Well, obviously life isn't just about technical challenges and physical processes. As we shall see, we are also highly social beings whose psychological welfare requires us to interact with each other. And different systems of beliefs will affect those interactions in ways both obvious and subtle. What's more, our individual sense of who we are is almost entirely conditioned by those systems of belief. Not to mention the ethical and moral decisions that we make.

As a for instance, consider the dilemma of 'bad' behavior. To a Christian this certainly might well have been influenced by bad upbringing or whatever. But it also might be because of—since we are selfish, imperfect beings—our simply being, well, bad. You know, Original Sin. And, whatever the cause, since we were created with free will, then ultimately the responsibility to act correctly is ours alone. And if we feel bad from doing bad, and we want to change our behavior, then we can repent, give our lives over to God, and then use our free will to become better people.

And it is true that certain existential philosophers, without believing in God or Purpose, have still focused on personal responsibility. All the same one of the enduring principles of liberal ideology and liberal democracy has always been that we arrive on this Earth as a blank slate. Remember, according to liberal democracy we don't have souls or essences. And that therefore our bad behavior *must* be the result of some outside cause, such as our upbringing or a faulty social system. Or, nowadays, our genes. And that therefore the only way to successfully change our behavior is through some sort of outside therapy, whether personal or governmental.

Now the Christian point of view may be right or wrong. The secular point of view might be right or wrong. They might both be wrong. But it is difficult to see how they both could be right. And it is pretty clear to see that if society chooses the wrong answer, then the bad behavior will never be made good.

If this were the natural sciences, then there would be a solution. Figure out a way to isolate the pertinent variable, then experiment away. After all, the 'truths' of science are always subject to change.

For instance, those of you who are into physics know that by the mid 19th Century the laws of Newtonian physics were considered elegant, all encompassing, and complete. Then along came radiation, the black box phenomenon, and light rays simultaneously acting like waves and particles. By 1930 the theories of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics—almost unbelievably bizarre to 19th Century thought—were the new established science.

But you simply can't do that with religions and ideologies.

Because instead of being analogous to the scientific method, 'isms' are more like a computer's basic operating system. The foundational assumptions are the background from which all of the programs derive. And as the old computer studies acronym goes, GIGO.

Garbage in, Garbage out.

. Which means that **if the foundational assumptions are wrong, then everything that is reasoned from them will also be wrong.**

Garbage in. Garbage out.

But it gets worse. Because, as I've said, the foundational assumptions underlying liberal democracy contain some real doozies. In fact, in light of what we know from both classical civilization and modern science, I'll go so far as to say that they are breathtakingly stupid.

But the thing of it is, the way our minds work, once we've accepted an ideological assumption, after a few iterations we tend to forget that the original assumption was just that. An assumption. Not a scientific truth. Not revealed truth. Just some guy's un backed up assertion. And then pretty soon we've built our whole edifice of conclusions upon that foundation.

Which raises the rather awkward question: Just how do you change the foundation without at the same time destroying the house?

And even worse than that: Just like the priests who control a religion, the true believers of an ideology, whether they are the apparatchiks who run a Marxist bureaucracy or the academics and pundits who stand guard over liberal democracy, these true believers don't take kindly to anyone questioning that foundation. Because on a deep intuitive level they just *know* that if the foundation goes then so does the whole house of cards which has been built on top of it. Which means that they, sitting at the top of said house of cards, will have the furthest to fall. So don't expect an open mind from any of them on any of this. In fact, expect desperation.

So here we all are, held captive by the ramifications of foundational assumptions. And as we shall see further down the line, almost each and every aspect of the postmodern mindset, and each and every postmodern issue which inflames and divides us, turns out to be a direct function of those foundational assumptions. But there's just about nothing we can tweak to make it all better. Because the dysfunctional world that we have today is pretty much the inevitable result of going down that road to which we've given that misleading name of liberal democracy. And no amount of pretend is going to make it otherwise.

Although as we end this session I'd like to reassure you that when I say that your thoughts are not your own, I am not saying that you yourself are stupid and I don't mean to imply that your emotions are not real or that you lack introspection. I'm just pointing out that, unless we put a whole lot of conscious effort into negating its effects, we are all subject to that observation of Herodotus. We all feel on a very deep level that all of our culture and thoughts, all of our behavior and beliefs, everything that we've absorbed through osmosis or whatever, are the right ones.

And if you still believe that someone like yourself is way too intelligent and independent to possibly be a victim of such, and especially to be the victim of some stupid, mindless ideology, then I suggest that you take some time to briefly consider the lives and thoughts of the many millions of people who lived for 75 years under that alternate reality which was the U.S.S.R. After all, they were real people with real thoughts and emotions, too.

Not that you'd necessarily know that, given our decades of propaganda on the subject.

Conveniently, though, our friends in the former Soviet Union are the subject of our next episode. So I hope that you can join me for that. And, until then, thanks again for so far having listened.