

## EPISODE 55

# THIS ENDLESS MOMENT

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 55 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. So... Last time we ended up in the year 1962. And now we're going to take it forward.

But first let's look at where things were at in 1962. The most popular song of that year was 'Stranger on the Shore', a piece for clarinet played by Mr. Acker Bilk. Of the next five songs, one of them was 'Roses Are Red' by Bobby Vinton, and another was 'Johnny Angel', by television sitcom star Shelly Fabares. Speaking of television, the most popular TV show (by far) was 'The Beverly Hillbillies'. Needless to say, none of this was a high water mark for American culture.

In the news, by far the most traumatic event was the Cuban Missile Crisis. Civil rights was an ongoing important issue. But almost all of the action in civil rights was in the American South, which at that time—even ignoring segregation—had a culture which made it seem like a foreign country totally separate from the rest of the U.S. In April John Glenn had become the first American to orbit the Earth. And several countries in Africa and the Caribbean gained their independence. Other than that, not much was happening.

So that, even though this podcast is always trying to look below the surface, in 1962 there really didn't seem to be anything there, either. Which is an important point, since usually revolutions are preceded by mass unrest and/or actual wars. For instance, the breakdown in social order and in moral standards had been pretty severe just prior to the French Revolution. And although the Bolsheviks had been a distinct minority right before the Russian Revolution, Socialist sentiment in general had been pretty widespread.

But the U.S. had never been fertile ground for Socialism, due both to the fact that, far more than Europe, it had always been mostly lacking in a rigid social structure, and also because historically there had always been somewhat of a labor shortage in America, which meant that no group like a lumpenproletariat had ever developed. So that the labor movement which did happen focused more on

getting better deals for individual workers, and not on class consciousness. In fact, the high point for American Socialism came in 1912, when Eugene Debs got 6% of the presidential vote.

Liberal Democracy, however, was somewhat of a stealth ideology. After all, whereas any Bolshevik could have quoted you chapter and verse from Marxist theory, Utilitarianism never had more than a handful of true believers. If that. In a sense, though, John Stuart Mill, knowingly or unknowingly, was as capable in public relations as had been Freud's nephew Philip Bernays. Because as I pointed out in Episode 2, labeling Mill's thinking as Atheistic Selfishness—which is probably the closest and most accurate description—probably wouldn't have gotten him too many converts. But even Conservatives presumably prefer liberal helpings of pie and ice cream. And even though early American government was a republic and not a democracy, still that's what most citizens called it. So that, just as the term 'torches of freedom' made cigarette smoking seem like a crusade for feminist progress, so, too, did 'Liberal Democracy' always *sound* like a wonderful idea.

Which meant that in 1962, even though the vast majority of Americans would not have identified with either Utilitarianism or its implications, were they actually explained to them, still, as I've spent the last few episodes outlining, the results were all around them.

And as it happened, there never needed to be any secret society of Blue Meanies surreptitiously running things behind the scenes, because it turns out that Liberal Democracy was in fact an almost perfect Stealth Ideology. For instance, take the Atheism, which would never have had even a ghost of a chance in highly religious America. Because there is not a smidgen of doubt that virtually all of the theorists behind Liberal Democracy, from Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill through Herbert Spencer and Bertrand Russell, were out and out atheists. But they usually hid this belief behind the much more socially acceptable label of 'agnostic', implying that great minds would naturally have difficulties squaring Bible stories with the frontiers of science. All of this conveniently ignoring the reality that even two thousand years ago no half-educated Greek or Roman believed in the primitive legends of gods and goddesses. And that most progressive Jewish theologians around the time of Christ accepted the Old Testament as myth. What's more, as I exhaustively went over back in the History episodes, up until the Age of Enlightenment *all* of the frontiers of science had been advanced by totally believing Christians, both Catholic and Protestant.

And then you might also throw in what we could call the 'Peary logic'. Since Nazism had been defeated on the battlefield, and since Marxists, as it were, wore their atheism on their sleeves, then the 'West' was so to speak the last man standing. And therefore we must be correct.

Finally, there had been that historical fluke that at the time of the American Revolution to a large extent American settlers did have more personal autonomy and personal freedom than humans had ever previously experienced. Indeed, in the absence of roads and towns, Virginia planters in particular were small kings unto themselves. And their belief in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century ideas of John Locke, which more or less equated ‘freedom’ with property rights, only strengthened this self image. Therefore, the American mind naturally always assumed that anything labeled as ‘freedom’ must be great.

So that in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, when various states’ ‘blue laws’ were struck down, and commercial businesses were allowed to operate on Sundays, it was widely seen as the most progressive of measures. And when ‘no fault’ divorce laws were enacted, this was also seen as wonderful progress. After all, why should anyone be stuck in a loveless marriage? In fact, the stealth was so steady that the very word ‘progressive’, which you’ll remember had been coined by late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Republicans looking for government protection against commercial interests in the pursuit of their self interest as opposed to the communal good, now morphed into a word synonymous with Liberal Democracy and the expansion of those same self interests.

And was anyone noticing? Well, there were a few among the fast dwindling group of what we might call middle brow intellectuals. H.G. Wells, who started out in the century as an enthusiastic backer of Fabian Socialism, Open Sex, and World Government, by the end of his life in 1946 was horribly depressed and pessimistic about the turn that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had taken. C.S. Lewis, now known for his Narnia children’s books, had a more extensive career as a Christian apologist and very concerned mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century citizen. Aldous Huxley, another celebrated popular intellectual of the mid century, was a follower of Eastern thought, and is mostly known for his dystopian novel, ‘Brave New World’. (Weirdly enough, by the way, both men died on November 22, 1963, the day of JFK’s assassination.)

Of course, by 1962 such thinkers were seen as the most irrelevant of fuddyduddies. Rather, if social critics existed at all, they came from the ranks of—for want of a better term—beatniks and post-beatniks. These critics were well aware of the fakeness and uselessness of so-called modern life. But if they had any intellectual antecedents, it was those 18<sup>th</sup> Century negative Deists such as Voltaire with their inherent hatred of any authority, be it that of Church or State or Whatever. In other words, they might have been putting their finger on a real problem, but their implicit and explicit solution was to call for more personal autonomy and less social authority or responsibility. For instance, the comedian

Lenny Bruce seemed to operate from the belief that if only more four letter words were allowed in common usage then somehow that would make the world a better place.

And one other aspect of the world circa 1962. Because it is true that up until then, and throughout most of human history, the female of the species had been seen primarily in a domestic light. Which makes sense, since we now know from the Science section that several hundred thousand years of evolution had conspired to make child bearing and child rearing an almost all consuming occupation and preoccupation for the feminine half of mankind. But women up until this point were also seen in their entirety: As mothers, sisters, daughters, and most important, wives and helpmates. Starting with the likes of Playboy Magazine at the end of World War II, however, now women were being presented as nothing more nor less than blatant sex objects, as in effect slabs of meat, there solely for the gratification of anonymous men's lust. And the so-called social critics of the era mostly saw nothing wrong with this. After all, in between the centerfolds and cheap stag humor, Playboy would run seemingly serious, high brow interviews with novelists such as Norman Mailer.

So that by 1962 it was all of a piece. If you were to be perceived of as hip or modern or cutting edge, you were also 'progressive' if you saw women as two dimensional chicks to be wined, dined, and, hopefully, laid.

Now there was a slight counter current going on at the same time. And although history would show that he was a very flawed person, the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 did have a certain inchoate optimism attached to it. A new generation was growing up which was one of the most egalitarian in history, and which had been minimally affected by either war or Depression. And 'meritocracy' was an idea which fit in both with America's original vision of itself and with the ideology of Liberal Democracy. This meant that now places like Harvard and Yale, which had always been melting pots of the sons of the wealthy and powerful, now started becoming melting pots of high achievers with high SAT scores.

Still, even with those slight counter currents, if you were standing there in 1962 there is probably not a chance in a million that you could have come close to predicting what the world would be like in 1967. Let alone 1970.

Because sometimes History does come out of left field.

Now ethanol is one of the simpler alcohols, and it is formed by the natural fermentation of organic matter. It also, after a fashion, gets people—among other animals—somewhat stoned. This

has been known since the beginning of humans knowing things. And over the millennia various other substances, such as hemp, opium poppies, and tobacco, have also been found to have either mild or strong effects upon the human consciousness.

With the discovery of the New World came the discovery of new psychoactive drugs. For instance, the Inca chewed coca leaves, which not only gave them extra stamina, but miraculously cured altitude sickness. Other Mesoamericans ingested either mind altering cacti or mushrooms. And then as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century progressed scientists were able to, in 1855, isolate the active ingredient cocaine, and, in 1897, the active ingredient mescaline.

So up until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century almost all human cultures had consumed some form or another of mind altering substances. But almost all human cultures had also constrained consumption of such substances—primarily alcohol—through both social norms and social disfavor. That is to say, if you were a 19<sup>th</sup> Century roue you were legally free to smoke all of the opium or drink all of the absinthe that you wanted to. You were also inevitably seen by the rest of respectable society as a good for nothing lowlife. And although, for instance, in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century cocaine was originally seen as an all purpose wonder drug, soon its negative effects became well known. And, it, too, joined the ranks of the lowlife drugs.

Throughout this period alcohol also had its ups and downs. For instance, in the 1830's America went through a period of comparatively uncontrolled inebriation. Times such as these, however, then gave rise to temperance movements. And all of this culminated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the Prohibition movement. Which, by the way, was one of the most radical and idealistic acts in political history, since at the time the Federal Government received most of its revenue from alcohol taxes. Also—and rewritten history notwithstanding—Prohibition actually proved to be quite popular. And the interesting real reason why it was repealed had everything to do with a political campaign financed by various millionaires who were hoping that renewed taxes on legal alcohol would serve to lower their own personal income tax rates.

With all of that as vague background, however: In 1939 a young Swiss chemist named Albert Hoffman, in an attempt to find new respiratory and circulatory stimulants, was just doing his job investigating various chemical compounds, and their various analogues, of the ergot fungus. Four years later, when returning to this research topic, he accidentally ingested a tiny amount of one of the substances, labeled LSD-25. (By the way LSD-1 – LSD24, and LSD-26 and higher had no effects.) Needless to say, his world changed that afternoon.

LSD now became a semi-secret research chemical, famously being tested by (among others) the CIA in the 1950's. As a 'truth serum', though, it was pretty much useless, since the person taking it was just as likely to not only be forthright and honest and tell his own side's secrets, but also to find the whole 'spy vs. spy' game to be beyond silly. Moreover, it was extremely difficult for the subject under the influence to even distinguish between 'us' and 'them'.

So, except for a few psychiatrists and other personal researchers (for instance Aldous Huxley first took it in 1953), by 1962, to the extent that LSD was known at all, it was still seen as a bizarre chemical footnote with very bizarre effects. (And, by the way, here's another strange part of the story. Because Albert Hoffman lived to the ripe old age of 102, and finally died only in 2008.)

Now as I already went over in a previous episode, Timothy Leary was never a professor at Harvard. Rather he was an itinerant psychologist with a somewhat checkered career who Harvard Psychology professor David McClelland met while on vacation in Italy in 1960, and who was then invited to Harvard to do studies in motivation. Dr. Leary also led a somewhat checkered career for the remainder of his life, so he can hardly lay claim to being someone to emulate, either academically or personally.

But he was at Harvard for those two or three years. And he did have a particular knack for self promotion. And by giving LSD to literally hundreds of people during his tenure there, he certainly did more than anyone else to, so to speak, put LSD on the map.

In a strong sense, though, Timothy Leary just happened to be the wrong person showing up at the right time. After all, as I pointed out, Mescaline had first been isolated back in 1897. And Albert Hoffman wrote a very intense account of his very intense experience back in 1943. No, for some reason that would not have been apparent to anyone in 1962, the world in 1962 was nonetheless somehow ready for LSD to be both publicized and popularized far and wide.

Although, before I get further into this, I would like to emphasize that it's not like the LSD experience was universally benign and enlightening. For if that had been the case, then everyone would have given it to everyone else, and world history would have been sweetness and light from then on. Instead the problem was that, along with moments of seemingly divine clarity and love, one could just as easily experience confusion, unfocused apprehension, and disturbing visions. Not to mention feelings of one's nervous system being ripped asunder both during and after the 'trip'.

Nor were the drastic changes in mental and societal outlook which would shortly overwhelm the status quo entirely a function of the psychedelic experience per se. Nor did that large a percentage of the population, even the youth population, ever take psychedelic drugs during the period of time now referred to as The Sixties. And this is even true for many of the cultural icons of that period. For instance, take the style of swirling, brightly colored pop drawings created by Peter Max that was called 'psychedelic art'. Max himself, though, never personally took any LSD.

Instead I think that it would be more useful to see LSD as a catalyst which started a cultural reaction which ended up creating way more social change than anyone would have possibly predicted.

And to illustrate this idea, let me present an approximate analogy.

In the beginning of the year 1750 Jean Jacques Rousseau had been a 38 year old penniless nobody. Within three years a couple of his written works, which described his idea that an ever increasingly complex materialistic society had resulted in making both individuals and the collective of mankind far worse off, not better, had made him into an overnight sensation. And within a few years the greater France was consumed with an almost quasi-religious enthusiasm for Sentimentality, for Heart over Head. Because it turned out that in a country which, starting with Louis XIV, had become ever more stilted and artificial, there was a huge unforeseen demand to return to the simple and the natural. You'll remember that Voltaire, who up until Rousseau had been France's most famous writer, had a motto praising, 'the superfluous, that most necessary of things'. So Rousseau in 1755 was basically the same person he had been in 1749. But he had also acted as a catalyst for incredible social change and renewed moral thought.

And I don't want to take the Rousseau analogy too far, since it is awkward to compare a person with a chemical. Although another interesting parallel is that the insights of Rousseau and the insights gained through the psychedelic experience have both been greatly misunderstood and mischaracterized over the years. Not to mention that some of the worst fanatics during the French Revolution claimed Rousseau as their inspiration.

With all of that out of the way, though, it's time to get into the particulars of the psychedelic experience. Because, again putting rewritten history aside, the critical essence of the changes which the Sixties wrought had nothing to do with people protesting wars or having leftist views. After all, anyone who has studied American history knows that it is a long procession of people intermittently protesting wars and/or having leftist views.

No, for better or worse, the essence of the Sixties had to do with people coming to grips with, and trying to figure out, that peculiar experience known as the psychedelic one. And, in fact, what we might call the psychological changes which have happened since then have become so pervasive that it is difficult to even remember clearly what the mindset was like circa 1962.

For instance, one of the largest issues is that, even though for thousands of years cultures in the East had recognized that Mind was qualitatively different from Consciousness, for some reason—whatever their other philosophical or ideological beliefs—no one in the West had ever really made that distinction. Thus Descartes had written, ‘I think, therefore I am’. Whereas an Indian or Chinese sage would have said, ‘I am conscious, therefore I am’. Today of course even suburban housewives and busy executives attend Mindfulness seminars and learn meditation, all in an attempt to separate the thinking part of the brain from the conscious part. Back then, though, hardly anyone would have been able to understand the conceptual difference.

Likewise, it is unlikely that many people back then would have grasped even the theoretical possibility that any person’s highly individualized, and often highly neurotic, particular ego could be separated from those truly necessary parts of identity which hold our rational minds together. Partially this was due to the voodoo of psychiatry. But it also had to do with the Age of Enlightenment’s dogmatic belief that souls and spirits and life forces or whatever just could not exist.

Well, those were two incredibly tightly held concepts which the LSD experience completely blew away.

Now, again, I don’t want to give the impression that LSD was some gentle, magic elixir sent by God in order to save a wicked world. Far from it. And if there was one aspect that was true for everyone, it was that LSD showed you very pointedly how many directions the mind could wander off to, with many of the options being very, very bad. To make another analogy though: Just as a few people find great reward in rock climbing up Yosemite, whereas the vast majority of us would instead kill ourselves in short order, so, too, LSD wasn’t exactly a party drug. One had to be somewhat fearless in order to take it on.

But for those who were of the right makeup, and who also were careful to take it in the right setting, the blowing away of one’s preexisting sense of mind and sense of identity put them in somewhat of the same position as Rene Descartes had been in in 1619 when he deliberately decided to disbelieve all that he had thought that he had known, and to then reconstruct reality and knowledge from scratch. Except that in this case it was far more intense. Because once this ride started you really

couldn't shut it down. What's more, finding yourself at what Aldous Huxley called 'the doors of perception' was accompanied by strange physical sensations, a sense of being in an alternative world of consciousness, and quasi-emotional states of feeling which ranged from the divine and sacramental all the way to confusion and just damn crazy thoughts.

But assuming that one was able to boldly proceed through this strange new world, perhaps the most basic and, for the time, earth shaking realization was that, unlike the fashionable still-going-strong 18<sup>th</sup> Century belief (derived from both Locke and Hume) that we humans, when we think that we are acting, instead are merely an organized collection of sensory responses who are reacting to an environment, people now had the first hand, realer-than-real experience of Consciousness, pure and simple. As I mentioned just a bit ago, except for the occasional mystic, going all the way back to Greek thought, no one in the West had ever clearly separated the concept of Consciousness from the concept of the Mind. But now, just as someone who has been to Japan *knows* that they have been to Japan, people were having that first hand experience of Consciousness Itself.

Now for most people there were just tantalizing glimpses of pure consciousness. But for a certain fortunate subset there was a much deeper realization—often taking place within a golden light—of a mixture of being, awareness, and bliss which somehow felt like Home itself. Which these people would later find out Hindus had already had a word for thousands of years previously: *satchitananda*. Which, needless to say, was a very interesting result for a chemical measured in the millionths of grams that works by primarily cross activating 5 HT-2A receptor heteromers.

Even for those fortunate few, however, the experience of being at that still, wondrous center only had a relatively short shelf life. Which brings us to the next major mental mindset adjustment which the psychedelic experience wrought. Because for most people who took LSD, especially once the original peak experience wore off, the separation of Consciousness from Mind often unpleasantly led to the realization that the... mind... just... won't... stop. As the Buddha (and others) had figured out 2500 years earlier, left to its uncontrolled self, the mind just goes on and on forever. In other words, you can think all those wonderful and not so wonderful thoughts all that you want. Or you can be at that glorious Center. But the one excludes the other.

Which, if you've just had even the briefest glimpse of pure consciousness and bliss without the mind, can be very annoying. Urgently, Cosmically sad. And, under the wrong circumstances, downright frightening.

Especially when those thoughts turned irrational. Or, in other words, beyond crazy. And if, later on in the trip, when one was in the position of working one's way from those doors of perception back to what had been previously accepted as the real world, then the benefits of rationality became all too obvious. Because happiness and bliss did reside in its own place, and wasn't connected to the mind. But there was also a certain calmness and beauty to a mind which wasn't being irrational, which wasn't being crazy, which was instead well ordered and, well, rational. And this clarity wasn't limited to working out syllogisms. It was also found in geometrical forms, in many types of music, and in honest representations of nature.

Now Rene Descartes was a certified genius. And most of the rest of us aren't. So among the subset of people who had genuinely 'cosmic' experiences, there were even fewer who had the intellectual background and discernment to make these deep philosophical discoveries.

But even if you weren't prepared to tangle with those deeper issues, then the psychedelic experience kept bringing up smaller questions which kept pointing to how weird, unnatural, and downright illogical, stupid, and dysfunctional the modern world circa 1962 had become. For instance, work. Only a few generations earlier, most men had spent their days working at primary occupations, such as cutting down trees, or growing crops. And it was pretty easy to draw a connecting line between work such as that and life itself. But being an insurance claim adjuster? Or a radio promotion guy? And what logical connection was there between, say, working in a bank, and having to wear a suit and tie in order to perform that work?

As for young women who took acid: Why, oh why, even if they weren't overweight, were they supposed to wear girdles? Or lather on makeup? Or shave under their arms? Why weren't they good enough just as God had made them? And speaking of that, didn't God make them to be mothers and helpmates and sisters and daughters, and not some sick Hugh Hefner idea of a sex kitten?

And the list of absurdities, both small and large, went on and on for everyone. The blatant artificiality and dishonesty and mental overload of a world where plastic was celebrated as *the* sign of the times became almost nausea inducing. Whereas if they were fortunate enough to find their way to some natural, peaceful setting then they were much, much more likely to experience the joy and the beauty.

So then it would seem like the answer was to somehow get back in touch with Nature. Just as it had been for Rousseau in 1750. Just as with the start of the Romantic Era around 1800. (And remember that the original meaning of the word ‘romantic’ literally was ‘going back to nature’.)

Nature. Ah, there was the rub. Because most of the (mostly) young people who were taking LSD had—as dwelt upon in the past few episodes—spent their entire existence living in a society which was becoming ever more and more artificial. In fact, a good case could be made that especially those who were on the fast track of college and career were well along in the process of becoming entirely fake themselves. And since in a certain sense ‘fake’ and ‘artificial’ are synonymous with ‘irrational’ and ‘crazy’, then the logical conclusion was that staying on that fast track of college and career would just end up in a lifelong bad trip.

And I could go on and on about the ins and outs and ups and downs of the culture that LSD created and of the preexisting culture which those affected by it totally rejected. And we’ll be getting to that a bit in the next episode. But for now there’s one more extremely important point. Because many people of both sexes discovered that the latent or active feeling of positivity, which they would label as love, and which they could either slightly or strongly sense in the here and now, felt far superior to any hypothetical success that may or may not have resulted from continuation in that Journalism major or Sociology major. More likely, it seemed to them that they would become even more Keeping Up With The Joneses rat racers than even their parents had been.

Thus it soon developed that now there were now two competing visions as to the purpose and meaning of the human experience.

In the one framework each person was seen as in essence a genderless collection of physical and emotional desires, in large or total measure formed as a result of environmental conditions, and held together by an ego structure based upon the principle of innate selfishness. In terms of the question of souls, etc., since there was no ‘there’ there, ephemeral happiness could still be achieved through the setting and realization of goals, and through the consumption of ever more complex and sophisticated goods and services. As I put it in the Science section, the purpose of life then became an endless repetition of dopamine feedback loops. Or, if you prefer the vernacular, endless attempts at trying to get your rocks off.

And although almost all desires—including those which had traditionally been thought of as perverted or base—were now, in the modern mind, equally true or false, somehow there was also some

magical ‘will of the people’, whereby the desires collecting the most votes were deemed to be the most valid. Finally, neurosis would always be an integral part of such existential conditions, and could best be managed through endless therapeutic massage.

Alternatively, one could believe in a framework where every human being was a spark of consciousness (either divine or otherwise) shining as a small light in the void. Our essential nature was cloaked, as it were, in layers of identity, such as sex, nationality, etc. But these layers were ultimately unreal. As were also the desires, the wandering thoughts, and the endless social demands which constantly clouded our minds. Next, far from being innately selfish, we were all junior members in the giant human race, which necessitated cooperation and compromise. Further, by working to limit our desires and calm our minds, we could, to a greater or lesser extent, return to that original state of clarity and consciousness. And, finally, since we were not passive blobs thrown about by our environment, but rather souls with agency, it would always be possible for us, actually incumbent on us, to be active generators of love, *agape*, positivity, or good will. Whatever you wanted to call it. But you knew it when you had it.

Oh, and one other thing. Under the first system, there was really no place for a sense of humor. Just as Marxism turned into a joyless pursuit of production goals, so, too, would this updated version of the Age of Enlightenment become a joyless pursuit of consumption goals. In fact, in the Freudian construct the entire idea of humor was explained away as displaced aggression.

In the second system, however, true happiness was not only attainable, but joy itself potentially radiated from each and every one of us, pure and simple, were we only able to remove the confusion clouding our minds. And to such a person there would be a constant sense of compassion and Cosmic good humor bubbling from within, as they unselfconsciously understood that life and death, pain and sorrow, and, yes, even all of those endless thoughts, were all necessary parts of the human condition and of the human family.

So, considering these two visions which now existed side by side... In a truly free and open marketplace of ideas, which of them do you think would become the more appealing?

Now if you answered ‘the second one’, then you’re ready to go on to the next episode. Which, of course, we’ll be doing soon enough.

In the meantime, though, of course, it’s now time to thank you once again for once again so far having listened.