

EPISODE 64

POSTMODERN DERANGEMENT SYNDROME

(And A Feast Of Red Herrings)

Hi there. Welcome to the beginning of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 64 of my podcast Dial it Back Or Die. And I know that I keep saying that from here on out I'm just going to be positive and upbeat. But that then in each episode there is at least one main point which is not exactly an upper. Well, there's at least one good reason for that. Because it keeps occurring to me that, as I try to present at least a plausible and feasible way out of all this, many if not most of you are going to react along the lines of my vision being just too hard, too severe, and all but impossible to actually implement in anything resembling the real world.

On the other hand, I've been saying from the beginning that, yes, this is going to be like putting toothpaste back into the tube. But that, when you think about it, the problem with getting toothpaste back into tubes is not that it's impossible. It's just that it's very, very difficult.

And a corollary to this is that the only way you or I or anyone else is going to be sufficiently motivated to attack the admittedly difficult problem of refilling toothpaste tubes is if we are absolutely convinced that there is no other option. Of course, most of us humans, even in most situations which are objectively as impossible as being about to be beheaded by ISIS, still vainly hope that something is going to come along to save us. And then on top of this human tendency, there is also that facet of being hypersocial that tends to make us follow instructions, follow orders, and just do as we're told. Which is why so many Jews in Nazi Germany would receive a pre-concentration camp order to appear at the local police station... and then they just went. And why so many Soviet citizens who ended up in the gulag did exactly the same.

Then there is inertia. Because even if there are scary headlines to read and scary thoughts being expressed by others, so long as you're still comfortable, then there's little motivation to actually do anything beyond 'liking' some internet post which agrees with you. (And if you're not in a comfortable position, then in practice probably most of your energy is being spent in trying to get yourself back into a comfortable position.)

And finally there's the natural human tendency to think, 'No matter what the Chicken Little doomsayers say, they're always saying stuff like that. And still the sky hasn't fallen. Probably this time it won't be any different. I mean, how bad can it get?'

So, what with all of these all too human tendencies which most of us humans have, it's probably not all that surprising that most of us also react to all of the craziness which is surrounding us by engaging in some form of what can be called *displacement*. That is to say, we tend to place the blame for that craziness not on its real source, which is so deep rooted and so all encompassing that it would take a heroic effort to even begin to confront it, but rather on some issue which may well be true in and of itself, but that is almost invariably at best one of the secondary or tertiary effects of that real source.

Now I've tried to keep current events and commentary about them out of this podcast. For one thing, there are any number of other commentators out there who are already doing that. For another, the only way that I can hope to make my thesis timeless is to try to do my best not to make it timely. The largest reason, though, is that, no matter how today's current events are or are not resolved, next week and next month and next year there will be other current events. And if we are always caught up in examining each and every individual tree, we will never see the forest.

On the other hand... At some point at the beginning of all this I promised that at the end of all this I would show you how my thesis neatly explained each and every thing which ails us. After all, one of the most convincing hallmarks of the Scientific Method is when the proof of a hypothesis not only answers the questions which were originally asked, but also answers other seemingly unrelated questions which no one had even thought to ask. And I do think that my thesis does this.

So this episode let's do that a bit. And let's start by looking at a prime example of displacement. And that's our good old friend Donald Trump.

Now let's stipulate, at the least for argument's sake, that Donald Trump is monumentally unqualified to be a President. That he is almost unqualified to be a person. That perhaps we can even call him evil. But let's also agree that something can be factually true, and yet also totally irrelevant to the question at hand. And to me at least the question at hand is: How do we get out of this cultural mess that we are in? After all, did Donald Trump cause this mess? Obviously no, because the complaints about the mess have long predated him. And would getting rid of Donald Trump really solve the deeper underlying issues? Well, you can hope. And I can hope. But I don't think that either one of us should hold our breath on the matter.

Further, for all of his idiotic tweets and bombastic bluster, his innate incompetence has more or less guaranteed that (so far at least) nothing permanently and/or substantively negative has been accomplished. After all, he is the first President since Jimmy Carter not to have invaded a foreign country. It's true that his handling of Covid has only been barely competent. But other advanced countries, such as England, have done even worse. And mask wearing in much of Europe is even lower than it is here.

Now admittedly I'm setting a pretty low bar here. But Harry Truman was even dumber than Trump. And in the History section I pointed out that not only was he primarily responsible for the nuclear arms race, but that his behavior towards the Soviet Union is what was primarily responsible for the Cold War happening. So that Trump is hardly unique in both being not too bright and in being annoyingly bellicose.

But my mother always told me that if I didn't have anything nice to say about someone, then I just shouldn't say anything. So I'm glad to leave it at that. And in practice I almost go out of my way to not be distracted by the Trump sideshow as much as I can.

However, it doesn't seem like anyone else is able to do this. Endless millions of words are expended. So many angry Op-Ed pieces are written about Donald Trump, as if he were some unalloyed Dr. Evil from a comic book. And perhaps even more are written, again with all of the one-dimensional fervor of a comic book, about how This Is The End Of The World unless we are able to Save Our Democracy from Donald Trump.

In fact, the fear and loathing engendered by Donald Trump is so strong, and so over the top, for so many people that there is a semi-tongue in cheek name for it: Trump Derangement Syndrome. Although don't tell anyone who is suffering from this that they are suffering from it. Because that will really put them over the top: How can you say that??? How can you not also be freaked out that this man is destroying Western Civilization???

But did you ever notice... Of all of those millions of words being written and said, not a single person (at least to my knowledge) has uttered anything close to this: Doesn't the election of Donald Trump prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that all of those people throughout history, from all the way back to Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and on up to many of our Founding Fathers themselves, who were all convinced that direct Democracy was a really dumb idea, doesn't this prove that they were in fact absolutely right?

I mean, think about it. A hundred years ago, when relatively small groups of old white men in smoke filled rooms chose Presidential candidates, there's not a chance in hell that they would have chosen someone with zero political or military experience, such as Donald Trump, or as morally and intellectually deficient as Donald Trump. Yet as the 20th Century progressed, and the dogmas of Liberal Democracy permeated the educated class more and more, and they all accepted the almost theological assumption that the voice of the least experienced, least educated voter was exactly equivalent to that of the most experienced, most educated one, then smoke filled rooms gave way to the primacy of the primaries. And never forget that Donald Trump became his party's nominee entirely because of the primary process. And he was then elected mostly by the votes of the least educated.

(Although if you are sitting there smirking on the Other Side, be aware that, first, for most of the 20th Century it was the Democrats who, because of their predominance in small, rural, relatively uneducated states, had the unfair advantage in the Electoral College. And that even today at least a third of the Democratic vote is from ethnic bloc voting, which is a holdover from 19th Century voting patterns. So that if that were not happening, then what we generally think of today as what the Democratic Party represents—namely, the over educated, socially liberal, managerial and professional class—said party would never stand a ghost of a chance of winning the national vote.)

Anyway, back to Donald Trump as the, to me at least, achingly obvious proof that Democracy, as defined by the ideology of Liberal Democracy, is a terrible idea. Because remember what those Democracy doubters have said throughout history. That the masses in fact cannot be trusted to make wise decisions. That hucksters and rabble rousers will inevitably arise who will sway the masses with their outlandish promises and emotional appeals. And that it is therefore beyond insane to treat running the government as some sort of popularity contest.

Except that, of course, as I've already mentioned, none of the commentators, both on the left and even on the mainstream right, ever seems to come even close to examining this as a possibility. No, they are convinced that the election of Trump must have been because of some cosmically weird set of circumstances. Or: It must have been because of the Russians! Certainly 'the People' would have never let us down like that. Somehow we just gotta Save Our Democracy or the world will end!

How ironic for the believers in Liberal Democracy. For at least the past decade they have been loudly saying that all of those people who haven't gotten with their particular program don't have any sort of valid point of view, but are just retreating into some nostalgic fantasy of life in the 1950's. Well, at least there was a real world in the 1950's that one could be nostalgic about. All that Liberal

Democracy ever promoted was a completely fantasy world which they pretended would exist once Liberal Democracy was in power. And now that we see the reality that really results from Liberal Democracy, they are the ones who are immediately nostalgic for their fantasy world, which never even came close to existing.

No, if you want to ‘save the democracy’ which America had a hundred years ago, you would have to by definition get rid of the pure direct democracy of that ideology which calls itself Liberal Democracy, and return to the ad hoc semi-democracy of a hundred years ago, where the ideal voter who candidates courted was both non-ethnic and boringly middle class, and where the people who chose those candidates were those old white men in those smoke filled rooms. Because the bait and switch of substituting old time American democracy with the Utilitarian ideology of Liberal Democracy, with its Utilitarian ethics and Utilitarian morals, in other words with no real ethics or morals at all, will inevitably end you up with some version of Donald Trump, a person who, not so coincidentally, has no real ethics or morals at all, either.

Okay, so that’s one current event. Here’s another. Now if you’ll remember way back in Episode 27, the one entitled ‘Problems With The Logic’, I pointed out that if you have an ideology that baldly states that furthering one’s individual self is the greatest good, then no one is ever going to sacrifice their individual self for the greater good. Which means that under such a system no one is ever going to volunteer to be a soldier or a policeman. After all, in either occupation there’s a very good chance that you might be killed. Then your individual self—the greatest good—would be gone. And for what? So that under such a system it therefore absolutely makes no logical sense to ‘serve the public’.

Which means that, with any sense of altruism gone out the window, then the only reason that you would become, say, a cop, is for the money and for the sense of power that it gives you. And since dying on the job would now only be for dumbbells and suckers, you would soon become proactively aggressive towards everyone, white, black, and whatever. Perpetrator or innocent bystander wouldn’t matter; you would learn to treat everyone in a paranoid and hostile manner, so that they, not you, would always be on the back foot. And if anyone was going to go down it would be them, not you.

And of course once you treat everyone as a potential criminal, pretty soon everyone is going to react as a criminal would. And then you feel even more justified in your aggression. And so forth and so on.

Again, though, this, in effect, militarization of local police forces, this dehumanization of the population, law abiding or not, is entirely predictable given the logic of Utilitarianism and of the Liberal Democracy which it spawned.

So that if you see videos of cops kneeling on somebody's neck with a look on their face that who they're kneeling on is a thing and not a person, don't be surprised.

But is that racism? Really?

Now as I've said before, anyone who ever experienced even a touch of the American South prior to the mid-Sixties knows how absurd it is to call the country of today 'racist'. (And, as a side note, if you weren't there then, you have no idea of the extent to which the American South was like a foreign country to the rest of the States. Moreover, just to set the record straight, children in the rest of America in the Fifties were thoroughly educated to be race-neutral in their values.)

Anyway, if the actual reality is that whatever residual 'racism' which remains is trivial at best, then why are our current current events totally freaked out about the subject? Two explanations.

Here's the first one: As I've been saying all along, ideology is weird in that it trumps both common sense and one's actual experience. So that when, in the Seventies and Eighties, the Soviet Union was turning out to be a social and economic failure, virtually no one blamed Marxism. Instead they concluded that they were just implementing it wrong. Whereas when you study how the Soviet Union operated you find that it actually was a pretty honest and accurate manifestation of Marxist theory.

Likewise now, when Liberal Democracy is collapsing upon itself, no true believer can admit to the possibility that maybe the ideology is to blame. Instead they look to Utilitarianism's requirement that everyone has an equal opportunity to fill their metaphorical shopping cart with goods and services, and they go, Aha! There's the problem! We just haven't achieved true equality yet.

Well, technically that is true. Although the interesting reality is that economic and social inequality have radically *increased* since 1980, which is around the same time that the ideology of Liberal Democracy achieved its dominance. But even putting this fact aside, when you think about it, no matter what you try, there is always going to be some inequality left. It's impossible for Equality to ever be perfect. But, hey, shouting 'racism' is a convenient way to comfort the true believer. Even as their Utilitarian Utopia recedes ever further into fantasy land.

So that's one reason why Liberal Democracy is the cause of the retreat into identity politics. But at this point someone might reasonably object: But you, mister podcast man, have been pointing out all along that the whole foundation of Liberal Democracy is that it seeks a world consisting entirely of self-seeking, self-promoting consumption units, stripped of all preexisting culture and tradition. And I assume that this would also mean stripped of preexisting ethnic identity, etc. So aren't you contradicting yourself now?

Good question. But always remember that an ideology can believe anything that it wants to, but that Reality always ends up with the last word on the subject. After all, you can believe all you want that you don't have to eat or drink, or that you don't have to die. But how do you think that's going to turn out? And you can also believe all you want that we're just a collection of self-maximizing individuals, and that social glue and being part of a larger social collective don't matter. But see what happens when you try implementing that.

In fact, I'll tell you what happens. Because, as I've also been saying all along, we've only been hypersocial for less than an eyeblink of geological time. And before that we were merely social, as in tribal. And what was one of the necessary steps in becoming hypersocial? Shared values, shared customs, shared language, etc. For instance, if you remember the Roman example: When Rome conquered a country, instead of destroying it, all it required of the conquered elite was that they conform to a simple set of common Roman behaviors, such as making token tributes to the Roman gods and accepting Roman law. And then they were mostly left alone to rule as before.

But they most definitely did have to agree to those common Roman behaviors.

So what happens when your ideology says that a demand for such common behaviors is so much superstitious poppycock? Well, you've stripped away that glue of commonality which made hypersocial behavior possible. And then people regress back to the lower, tribal mentality. And voila: Identity politics.

And while we're on the subject... Let me suggest that, although this is not absolutely true, in general racism, as it is generally understood, doesn't exist. What actually is going on is mostly what could be called culturalism.

After all, as I just pointed out one more time, the only way that we evolving humans can transition from being tribal animals into being hypersocial animals is if there is that social glue happening. And this social glue can only arise from adopting widely accepted social norms. And it

should go without saying, but these norms also include a common language, common ways of smoothing social intercourse, common mores, and common laws. This even extends to common grammar and common accents, if only to the extent that everyone recognizes that, for instance, even if one's grammar or accent varies, there is still a 'proper English' which properly educated people speak.

Otherwise the other people who inhabit our hypersocial communal spaces will seem strangely different. As outside the hypersocial 'circle of trust'. And in such a situation it will be all too easy for our primitive tribal responses to these 'different' people to reassert themselves.

And if those people who haven't gotten with this program happen to be of an obviously different ethnicity, or are even more obviously alien, such as belonging to a different race, it will then be almost natural for the people who have already dutifully internalized all those prevalent social norms and modes of behavior, especially the less educated ones, to react with extreme distrust, even hatred, towards these 'outsiders' who are within their midst. So it will definitely seem like racism, especially to those on the receiving end.

What happens, though, when, after a generation or so, outsider groups have also internalized the social norms and all, and have bought into the prevailing culture? Well, that's what the whole 'melting pot' idea was always about. And if third generation Italians are no longer speaking with obvious Italian accents, and second generation Indians or Africans are no longer speaking English with their distinctive original accents, and most especially if all of those people are clearly living middle class lives with middle class values, then in general they will be totally accepted as 'real' Americans. Even by right wing Republicans. After all, a first generation American like Colin Powell could have probably easily gotten the Republican nomination for President even back in 1996. Because, of course, since he was totally assimilated, he didn't come across as an 'other'.

Now the situation at present is that around 70% of blacks in America are classified as middle class or higher. Which is probably around 60% more than it was sixty years ago. And this is not the place for an extended discussion as to why the remaining 30% are not yet with the melting pot program. I mean, slavery in the Caribbean was much more brutal than it was here, and Africans under Colonialism were treated with explicit racist contempt. Yet both groups are famously eager and willing to become 'American' as quickly as possible. So that obviously there were some sorts of 'original sin' here which had nothing to do with slavery per se. But I would note that, along with that, it is also true that the whole theory of Liberal Democracy, by not only denying the need for those joint social norms which necessarily trump individual desires, but even ridiculing the idea, more or less pulled the rug out

from under those blacks of sixty or eighty years ago who, having started out as truly atomized beings due to slavery and the slave trade, were ever so slowly bringing themselves up by their bootstraps, both with a sense of community and with inculcating American middle class values.

Further, by labeling as racist all those Americans who are not lock step with the Liberal Democracy narrative, all it does is to insult and alienate and anger the vast majority of 'traditional' Americans, who now have no problem with accepting the Italians and East Indians and Chinese and black Caribbeans and Africans, not to mention that 70% of middle class American blacks. And who likewise would have no problem with the other 30% once they, too, become fully integrated into all aspects of American culture and mores.

Finally, putting aside the emotionally charged issue of racism, this understanding of how a lack of commonly shared social norms immediately triggers the primitive tribal, pre-hypersocial response of fear and loathing of the 'other', also completely explains both our present day hyper-polarized politics and our hyper-polarized population.

Because, as I pointed out way back in Episode 2, the awful division in our country is between those elites, and others, who have totally bought into the Utilitarian/Liberal Democracy ideology, and those people who, whether they are able to articulate it or not, are intuitively freaked out over where that ideology leads. And, unfortunately, there is just no way to bridge that divide. Because the true believers smugly believe that their beliefs are really due to their better education, and (secretly) because of their superior worth. And most definitely not because they themselves have been brainwashed by some ideology which has successfully taken over the educational system. No, they are just absolutely sure that the other side is just dumb, ignorant, or just intrinsically obtuse.

Whereas the other side is so offended by being so disrespected and so looked down upon that... Well, they still have the vote. And they can still deliver a big F.U. to those arrogant, smirking jerks who control all of the cultural levers. Even if that F.U. extends to electing a Donald Trump.

Anyway, there are obviously many other current events which I could address, and likewise explain in terms of the takeover of the American Dream by the Liberal Democracy Nightmare. But I'll leave it to you to figure out those other issues on your own.

And so, in conclusion...

As I record this we are just over a month away from a Presidential election. And I have no idea as to how it will turn out. But I will make this prediction: Namely, that even if Donald Trump is unceremoniously thrown out—as I believe he should be—it's not going to make a whit of difference as to our disintegrating culture, our partisan politics, our intellectual malaise, and this overwhelming sense that so many of us feel about an impending Apocalypse of some kind. Sure, there may be a week or two of joy and celebration. But sooner rather than later all of the fear and dread will come crashing down upon us once again. The slow motion train wreck will continue to accelerate logarithmically. National life will continue to be a screen shot of a house of cards collapsing.

And it may well be even worse this time, because we will no longer be able to pretend that Donald Trump is to blame for all of this.

And if and when *that* happens, then Lord help us.

Because a little while ago I suggested that you may well be suffering from Trump Derangement Syndrome. But that's not what's really going on. What's really going on is that those desperate feelings and fears actually mean that you are suffering from Postmodern Derangement Syndrome. In other words, all of these current events that you think are so important are really just so many red herrings. Because even Donald Trump is just some ineffectual moron sitting on some metaphorical bar stool and spouting away. To make probably a bad analogy, it's kind of like freaking out about your shoes being too tight, or not being able to find your handkerchief, when what's really going on is that you're coughing your lungs out and dying of Stage Four Cancer.

After all, as I said at the beginning of this episode, I totally get it why people would do that. I totally understand why we consume ourselves with Donald Trump and other ephemeral current events, when the wave which is about to crash down upon us is ten to fifty times more intrinsically disturbing. For, unfortunately, that quote from Jack Nicholson applies to most of us humans: We can't handle the truth.

Again, though, the problem is that reality has a way of interfering with all of our carefully laid fantasies and all of our displaced fears. And, absent putting our minds and hearts and souls into really focusing, into agreeing to a level of discipline that most of us have always been too lazy to even attempt to do, and into really figuring out a way to get that toothpaste back into the tube, I am afraid that all of those Apocalyptic visions are going to prove all too true.

So, now have I sufficiently scared you enough? I sincerely hope so, since that was one of my primary motivations in starting this podcast.

And now, when we're at the end of the podcast I'm tired of shouting from on top of some soap box. I'm tired of futzing around. And if you're going to react in shocked horror when you fully realize what's being asked of you, then so be it. So for these last few episodes I'm just going to forge ahead and, without hemming or hawing, just lay all my cards on the table. Even if you don't particularly like what I'm going to say.

Except that, of course, by 'right now' I really mean the next episode. Which will be coming soon enough.

In the meantime, though, as always, I would like to thank you once again for once again spending the time and so far having listened.