

EPISODE 49

MANLY VIRTUES

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 49 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now in the last two episodes I've been mostly dealing with how evolution has shaped the, as it were, female half of the human equation. This episode we're going to be dealing with the male.

And, just to make sure here, I trust that the last two episodes didn't give you the mistaken impression that somehow I think that every woman in this world has evolved into becoming a perfect angel of light or paragon of mercy. As I keep pointing out, it is best if you keep in mind the idea that we are in the *midst* of an evolutionary moment. This is why selfishness and selflessness, altruism and cruelty, cool rationality and dumb emotionalism, can all manifest themselves, sometimes in the exact same person. Of course, having the completely wrong ideology running our lives doesn't help matters any. But even in the best of circumstances few humans of any gender are going to anytime soon be even near the vicinity of perfection.

Nor—again—do I mean to come anywhere close to suggesting that there is some sort of clear cut black/white absolute dichotomy between male and female mentalities and personalities. Man or woman, we are all hypersocial animals predisposed to follow authority. We all have innate moral compasses which we may or may not follow. We all struggle to resist immediate temptations. And all of our minds are a blend of the conscious and the unconscious. And just as some women will be taller than some men, so too will some women read maps better than some men, and on the other side some men will be more sociable and empathetic than some women.

Still, however, it is difficult to deny that at the present moment women have evolved into becoming much, much closer to the ideal *social* citizens that hypersociety requires. Studies have shown that they tend to get along with each other much better, even with strangers from an alien culture. They don't care all that much about rank, hierarchy, privilege or success for its own sake. They will even nurse each other's babies, and will willingly raise children who have zero genetic relationship to them.

Indeed, up until the 20th Century began, it had been a commonplace observation that civilization itself seemed to have been primarily created for the benefit of women. Its laws and its safety, its rules of decorum and politesse, its furtherance of beauty and the arts, all were seen as means and ways to satisfy the natural inclination of the ladies.

Or to put it another way: The very idea of civilization can be seen to be a natural outgrowth of the needs and wants of women.

Meanwhile, with men... Not so much. And not just the Civilization part, but also socialization in general.

Although, as I went over earlier, it's kind of strange that human males should have had, in any way, shape or form, anything to do with any kind of even semi-egalitarian social setting, let alone a hyper- one. After all, those earlier hypersocial insect societies which had developed, of ants, bees, and termites, were almost exclusively feminine. The archtypical male mammal, except for the mating season, spends his entire adult life roaming around by himself.

This is, of course, because the way that evolution evolved is that when most males get together with other males they have to fight. One needs to dominate all the others so that it can then impregnate any available female. No one knows precisely why Life developed in this way. (For that matter, biology still does not have all that great an answer for why sex came about in the first place. After all, bacteria get new genetic material all the time without needing or having sex.)

But the plain fact is that that's the way that animal life did develop.

So that—as was covered in an earlier episode—even when males are folded into a larger group, as with baboons, it usually results in misery for them. They are either stressed out from the humiliation of being on the bottom rung of the ladder or, if they are fortunate enough to be on top, stressed out from fear of all those competitors.

Which means that it is pretty amazing that human society has been able to absorb men into it even to the extent that it has. As I've already stated (and as much as it might surprise anyone who watches professional wrestling, for instance) human males are pretty much free from the need for dominance displays and rigid hierarchy. In many, if not most, situations large groups of men, even strangers, can live together and interact quite amicably. This is why they can take that flight from New York to Los Angeles without tearing each other apart. And in those instances where strict rank and hierarchy do come into play, this usually happens in all male institutions such as the military or prison.

But we would be kidding ourselves not to recognize that men have only sort of half evolved into being able to successfully live in a hypersocial condition.

After all, once the first inklings of civilization started to develop in Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and the like, kings and kingdoms immediately sprang forth. Classes of nobility, tradesmen, merchants, and a great mass of unwashed poor immediately stratified. All too many men became obsessed with fame and renown, badges of success, and signs of privilege.

What's more, stretching way back before then, and on into the present, warfare—the ultimate dominance display—has been almost a constant preoccupation for the male half of the human race. In fact, in many ways this sort of behavior has been almost synonymous with manhood. And when looked at from the right angle, it's even easy to understand how barbarians such as the Huns or the Mongolians could see themselves and their rugged, brutal lives as far superior to those of the pitiful, effeminate, law abiding men in their comfortable well fitting clothes and in those well run civilized cities which said barbarians were so fond of destroying.

But when you think about it for a while you can see what a terrible bind the human male is actually in. Because what human society is asking him to do is to be two totally contradictory personalities. Simultaneously.

For on the one hand, when he is with his wife and family in particular, and within his larger social group in general, he needs to be relatively kind and gentle. Those perpetually freaked out babies can't even begin to handle being treated with an attitude remotely as harsh as that which another full grown man would accept as perfectly normal. And the same pretty much goes with their older siblings. Not to mention that their mothers have *necessarily* evolved to be kind and gentle themselves. And to therefore have delicate sensibilities. So that in effect each and every man has to learn to tone it way, way down in order for family life to be able to exist at all.

Nor in practice can he be all that assertive or aggressive to the other members of his immediate clan, tribe, or whatever. Because then life would immediately degenerate into constant fighting and conflict, dominance displays, and those stress inducing hierarchies. Just like with virtually every other primate species on Earth.

Anyway, as I keep saying, the good news is that to a large extent men have succeeded in this. We humans, almost unique among primates, no longer have large, vicious canine teeth or incredibly sharp claws. Which means that even when we do get into fights no hands get bitten off and no faces

get ripped off. In fact, anthropologists have a term for these morphological changes in humans. They say that human males have become feminized.

I mean, even Josef Stalin was kind and gentle towards his daughter.

On the other hand, however, men have also evolved to necessarily be vigilant and potentially violent towards everyone and everything outside of their group. After all, it has only been a century or so since wolves and bears and lions and tigers have not been a clear and present actual life threatening danger to people living in rural areas. And even if a particular man should be of a totally peaceful disposition, and even if his tribe is likewise so, that doesn't mean that those men and/or tribes adjacent to them can't or won't swoop in and attack them at any moment. While meantime all those women and children who depend on them are sitting there helpless and defenseless.

And, as we all know, once the revved up cycle of paranoia, aggression, and warfare starts, it is pretty hard to put a stop to it.

So it's a delicate balance, to say the least. Probably much more psychologically delicate than the physical balance which is needed for walking erect. And women, even modern women, want and need both types of man in their men. For instance, when women are surveyed about what traits they most desire in a man, kindness and gentleness usually tops the list. At the same time, studies have shown that almost all women would like a mate who is bigger and stronger than they are. There are few married women, even those with a strong feminist bent, who would care to alternate with their husbands on going downstairs to check out that scary noise late at night.

One can even posit that the familiar feminine fantasy of a relationship with a fireman mostly has to do with the fact that such a person evokes strength and protectiveness from danger, while avoiding the anger and aggression that, say, policemen or soldiers all too often tend to display.

Still: What's in it for the man??? What's he getting out of all this?

Because never forget that the path by which women have evolved into hypersocial beings was pretty straightforward. Mammalian mothers have always taken care of their young. Except for a few strange outliers like hyenas, most female mammals have far less testosterone than males, so are far, far less aggressive. The hormone oxytocin, which pours into all mammalian mothers when giving birth and lactating, is a powerful social bonding agent.

So that in effect human mothers are just taking everything a few obvious steps forward from what they were already doing as primate mothers.

But as the last episode pointed out, so much of monogamy and fatherhood goes completely against how most male animals, and specifically all male primates, have always behaved. So that it has been a jarring and relatively instantaneous transformation for male humans. After all, even male birds had seventy millions years or so to adjust to co-parenthood.

So simple evolutionary theory would therefore strongly suggest that surely there must be some sort of compensation involved. What's more, Nature must have had to come up with behavioral triggers and behavioral constraints so that men would be able to adapt to such clearly un-male-animal-like behavior.

I would suggest that one biological/psychological prompt would be that of Helplessness. For taking care of the helpless is definitely not a normal male animal trait. As I mentioned, if a bear father sees his baby cubs, all he really sees is food. But as I also mentioned virtually every human male has evolved enough so that he immediately strives to be protective towards a helpless infant or child.

And therefore it shouldn't be surprising that an extremely successful survival strategy would be for human females to appear helpless.

And if you can put political correctness aside for a moment you should be able to see why this is so. Because on their own, and especially if they also have a brood of children, human females *are* defenseless and helpless. So that the more that they can evoke that same gut reaction from a man as when he sees a helpless infant, the better it is for them.

And this may well explain the phenomenon of why men tend to want to try to bulk up and appear bigger and stronger, whereas women tend to want to slim down and appear smaller and weaker.

Nor is this resort to the defenselessness instinct in men limited to women. For instance, when some tribes lose in battle, they will not just bow to their conquerors, but stretch their necks out as if waiting for the sword. The hope is that the victor will then change his mind from one of vengeance to one of pity.

And what about compensation for settling down and spending the better part of one's life helping out with what had almost always been an exclusively feminine task? Well, if you really want to put political correctness aside, try this thought: In return, men got a little respect and obedience.

Now I've hopefully already firmly established that all of us humans are obedient. So that in that context the famous quip that 90% of life involves just showing up should perhaps be amended to really read that 90% of life involves just showing up and doing what you're told.

But women, because of the nature of their innate defenselessness, especially had to evolve to be obedient. After all, as I've already noted, if a female gorilla or chimpanzee doesn't like the way she is being treated by the male or male of her group, she can (and often does) just take her child and leave.

But the human female never had that option. Nor did she have the option of so annoying her husband or the rest of the group that they told her to leave. That's just been a plain biological fact since *homo sapiens* began. So of course she would have had to evolve to become totally obedient. Although, given that she was also evolving so as to always want to put the welfare of her babies and children first, there would have probably been little desire in her for the physical or mental independence that we postmodern observers presume that every woman must surely want.

Now it's critical to keep in mind that a large reason why humanity for those three hundred thousand years or so was also evolving to become hypersocial, inclusive, and with strict social norms, was so that these stressful situations didn't arise in the first place. Also—and this is incredibly important—that in exchange for her obedience a husband was supposed to reciprocate by reining in his masculine impulses and by striving to become tender and sweet. In other words, a gentle man. Or gentleman, if you will. (Hence the traditional marriage vows of obey and cherish.) Anyway, finally, given how men have only half evolved, it was incredibly incumbent on the larger society to make sure that they did exactly that. And also to in every other way keep them in line so that they didn't immediately devolve into becoming petty tyrants.

In other words, the only way that this family thing worked is if the larger society held large metaphorical sticks over the head of each and every man within it. Which included strong social norms and strong pressure and strong social sanctions against those who misbehaved.

But, assuming the extremely large assumption that a culture did successfully create these restraints, the menfolk got at least some payment for having given up the independence and total lack of responsibility that had been the birthright of virtually all other male animals. And so the sense of being 'king in one's castle' was vitally important for males because in so many other ways hypersocial living was destroying another aspect of male animal identity that had existed since way back in the beginning.

Today we call it self-respect.

And if you want to see what this biological phenomenon is, especially among primates, I suggest that sometime you stare directly into the eyes of a male ape or monkey. And this works best if you, too, are another male. Because most species, even if they are much smaller than humans, will in a

matter of seconds become totally enraged. If they are in a cage they will scream, bare their teeth, and rattle it. If they aren't in a cage... Well, on second thought, you probably shouldn't even think about doing it.

Now most human males have enough innate self-control, not to mention primate instinct, that they won't ever try to stare down other men. (Although should you find yourself in a prison, a war torn country, or an inner city slum—all places where the social glue and other ameliorating influences have disappeared—unasked for eye contact can indeed very easily get you knifed or killed.) Anyway, it helps in this context we can think of self-respect as the necessary residual remains of those dominance displays that we have mostly risen above. Because if men were not granted a certain modicum of self-respect they would end up just as humiliated, stressed out, and resentful as those poor baboons at the bottom of the baboon ladder.

Which is why it was so important for evolution to also allow men to be the paterfamilia. The head of the family. The guy who the wife and the children and the grandchildren looked up to. And respected.

And this became even more critical around ten thousand years ago when we started to shift from the tribal unit to the hypersocial one. Because it is one thing to be in a group of around 150 where our brains are the right size so that we can all know each other, especially the other men, and quite another to be an anonymous cog in a Mesopotamian or Egyptian population of hundreds of thousands.

What's more, in such a situation a certain paradox arises. On the one hand one's 'tribal' identity expands far beyond our brain's natural limits. On the other hand, our 'social unit' identity shrinks to just that of our extended (and, in modern days, nuclear) family.

So all in all the parameters that I have been outlining—being friendly and amenable to wife and kin and even most strangers, while also being ready to be aggressive and even warlike towards outsiders and enemies; being a good, obedient subject to authority while still requiring obedience from wife and children; putting up with never being able to be king of the mountain in exchange for being head of a family—all require a balancing act which is far more delicate than the difficult one required for us mammalian quadrupeds to have become bipeds. Looked at from this vantage point, it's rather amazing that human males have been folded into hypersociety to the extent that they have, and that we as a species have succeeded at getting as far as we have gotten beyond the Paleolithic.

But it gets even trickier.

Because I still haven't talked about sex.

Now as the last chapter tried to make clear, pair bonding/monogamy is a strange state of affairs for mammals, especially primates, to engage in. Promiscuity and polygamy are much more common. And by far the likeliest reason why we humans adopted pair bonding is that, given our preposterously prenatal births, our extremely long childhoods, and the need for the imparting of incredibly complex culture, language, and other skills, one parent is just not enough. For us to exist as a species, somehow the father had to be coaxed into hanging around for the next twenty years or so with just his one allowed wife and mother.

(And, yes, I know that some human societies have practiced polygamy. But that option has usually been available only to a small minority of high status and/or wealthy males who could well afford to take care of more than one 'family'. And, most importantly, these men were still totally expected to observe all of the other responsibilities and obligations of fatherhood.)

So one might expect from all this that Nature would have acted so that women would evolve to want just one man and men would evolve to want just one woman. Moreover, one might expect both sexes to evolve so that neither would end up desiring the sexual act all that much. After all, if only one possible mate was ever going to be available, and if having children more than semi-annually would drain the biological resources, than any kind of sex drive, especially a hyperactive one, would be counter-productive, to say the least.

But although the previous argument may be pretty accurate in explaining how many women, especially married ones, actually feel, in practice the human male isn't anywhere close to that. If anything, the human male is among the most hyper-sexed of all animals. His penis is by far the largest of any primate. The human female's breasts are far larger than what is necessary for lactation. They and the rest of her dramatically curvy shape serve to arouse the male and his penis all the more. Unlike female baboons and other apes, which are in estrus only every so often, each and every human female that a man sees is hypothetically 'available' for sex almost every day of the year.

What's more, he sees her quite readily because her body is hairless.

Now I've already mentioned how Anthropology has never really answered the question of why humans, uniquely among primates (and almost uniquely among mammals), are without any covering beyond skin. I would suggest that a female's nakedness exists for two reasons. First, along with her extra layer of subcutaneous fat, those large breasts, and almost complete lack of upper body strength, it

makes her look (and be) especially defenseless, which provokes that protectiveness response in the otherwise self absorbed male.

Second, it turns him on all the more.

Yet the demands of monogamy mean that each and every man is going to be horribly frustrated by all of those women walking by that he can't have. What in the world could possibly be going on?

One explanation might be that this is all a horrible mistake of Nature. After all, successful species are an *end* product of evolution, and all sorts of strange and dumb mutations and permutations can happen in the middle. We are here right here right now, so this is the Reality that we know. But that doesn't mean that all the biological/mental/consciousness issues involved with us have been remotely resolved as of yet.

(Now, to be highly speculative, it's also quite possible that what we call sexual energy is also intimately connected to our nervous system/consciousness. What the Chinese call ch'i and what the discipline of yoga calls kundalini. Which would mean that what is currently perceived as hypersexuality is actually vital for our ultimate development. Although not for sex per se. But this idea, as with all other questions of religion or 'spirituality', is, once again, beyond the scope of this podcast.)

But yet another explanation could be that in a weird way the fact that human males are so sexed up really has to do with actually promoting and reinforcing monogamy.

Let me explain:

After all, a large part of this episode has been to emphasize that the institution of monogamy isn't all that obviously a good deal for the man. Not only does he have to put a whole lot of effort into being non-aggressive and civilized, but he also has to put a whole lot of time and effort into the care and rearing of the young, something that few other male mammals have to or want to do. A little authority and respect no doubt helps ease that burden. But are these nearly enough 'carrots'? On the other hand, if he is highly charged sexually, if the female form is constantly turning him on, *and* having sex with his wife is the **only** way that he can have it, then this would certainly be an additional highly motivating reason for him to stick around.

Ah, but there's the rub. Because, as I've said, the biological fact is that for the vast majority of men the vast majority of women will also turn them on. We're back to that half-evolved conundrum again. So that the only way that such a scheme could work is if tribes, societies, and cultures brandished their whole assortment of metaphorical sticks which forced all these men to behave

monogamously. Otherwise the stability of the family would rapidly fall apart, children would be raised improperly, and culture would disintegrate. Along with our existence as a species.

Talk about a delicate balancing act. Once again, given such parameters, it's rather amazing that we have made it this far.

Although I don't want to dwell too much on this train of thought. Because it's just as logically valid to look at the 'cup half full' version of *half-evolved*. Because there are many men who all on their own, with no prompting from society, are loving and faithful husbands. Who are responsible and caring fathers. And who are perfectly content with the domestic arrangement of monogamy and family. After all, every man in the world started off as one of those freaked out babies who both required extreme emotional warmth and appreciated the innocence of childhood. And it is quite rewarding in and of itself to be able to provide the structure and protection for a new generation. Not to mention that the domestic situation also gives them, now in their relatively crusty and competitive adulthood, the chance to again experience, when with their wife and children, some of that softness and innocence of lost youth.

In fact, I would go so far to say that it is probable that a majority of men in this world do indeed admire this ideal, even if they don't always live up to it themselves.

But let's be real. The cup is also half empty. And the way that genetics works in this interim period is that some men are just going to naturally be irredeemably promiscuous and irresponsible. More importantly, many others will have the best intentions, but—absent Society and its giant sticks hanging over their heads—will not end up being the doting, responsible husbands and fathers that human women have evolved to want, expect, and need.

And the implications of this are so vitally important.

Because for the past three hundred thousand years or so even under the best of circumstances the women (and their children) have been at the mercy of the menfolk. After all, they really have been smaller and weaker. They really couldn't take care of themselves without the protection of the larger group. And most specifically of their monogamous men.

What's more I am only too aware of all the cultures where the females weren't respected, where their place in society degenerated into that of abject servitude. Indeed, as I pointed out, one of the triumphs of Civilization was that (at least in theory) women were elevated to be the equal of men.

But—again—this only happened insofar as Civilization forced all those half evolved men to at least act like they were fully evolved.

Or else.

And for the moment I will leave it to you to contemplate the results of taking that 'Or else' away. Of even suggesting that promiscuity might be a fun or natural idea for those half-evolved men. Let alone of adopting an ideology that specifically puts hedonistic pleasure above dull old drab responsibility.

Okay. And with that pleasant observation the Science section comes to a close. And I trust—since you've come along this far—that it has been highly informative as to both our natural behaviors as humans and our natural parameters as humans. I also hope that you've also been able to see at least some of the ways that postmodern humans are so out of sync with all of that.

Although I suspect, since what I've been saying is so out of sync with what we've all been taught to believe in this postmodern world, that you still might have a certain number of questions and comments.

So in the next episode I will try to address some of them. And I will also attempt to sort of summarize what I've gone over in the last seventeen or so episodes.

Although, as always, that is for the next episode.

And, as always, as for this episode, once again I would like to thank you so much for so far having listened.