

EPISODE 59

LET'S GET REAL

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 59 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now if you've been following along, you are aware that we are finally done with all of the presentation of the thesis, with all of the history, with all of the science, and with all of the even more history of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

And now comes the fun part. The part which, if you've been slogging it through all of the other 58 episodes, you've been waiting for. The part where I put up or shut up. The part where I tell you what could plausibly be done so as to rectify the situation.

Well, not quite so fast. Because there's still something else which I need to go over again before we proceed.

Because, given how strongly I've tried to present to you just how hopeless a situation we have here at the proverbial end of the road, even a plausible solution might seem to be just too much effort with too little probability of success.

And in a certain sense that most certainly could be the case. But not necessarily. After all, every new day is potentially a new beginning. Every new life is by definition a new beginning. And at this stage of our cultural collapse we may well all be walking around with these heavy figurative chains of addiction around our necks. Addiction to our ideology. Addiction to that dopamine rush. And every addict is always convinced that their chains are just too heavy to ever be removed.

But we can also realize that in the end it is humans who are the ones who have put those chains there. Nor do those chains have any locks on them. So that, as humans, if we care enough about it, we can always simply remove the chains and walk around free. And every addict who has ever broken any addiction knows that this is true.

Or permit me to give you an inexact and admittedly semi-simplistic analogy.

Let's say that you had originally wanted to drive to Mexico. But for some reason someone had told you that you could get there by going North. And for some reason you had believed them. So that you had been dutifully driving north for mile after mile. But instead of the tropical landscape you had

been expecting to see, the situation is fast becoming colder and bleaker. And now you're driving through a raging blizzard on a pancake flat wasteland, with your summer tires on to boot.

So you finally stop and ask around. And you find out that you're actually in Saskatchewan.

Now on the one hand that would certainly be a depressing state of affairs. Because here you are, having spent all of that money and time going in the absolutely wrong direction. Time and money that you're never going to get back.

But I really doubt that your reaction to all of this would be to continue driving north with renewed dedication. Nor would you just sit there in despair. No, after spending a certain amount of time kicking yourself because you had been so friggin' stupid in the first place, you would realize that the time and effort spent so far was what in Economics is called a sunk cost. And if you still wanted to get to Mexico, and more importantly if you wanted to get yourself out of the damn blizzard, you would then simply turn your car around and start heading south.

Problem solved.

Except, of course, you might have noticed a small flaw in my analogy of your finding yourself in Saskatchewan. And this is that not only is the fact of the blinding snowstorm obvious, but you are also trusting the person who is telling you to drive south. Most importantly, it is also more than clear that there are no other options. Unfortunately, however, the way that our minds actually work is that, even when everything is clear cut, we are usually held back from acting by a tremendous force of inertia.

What's more, they always say that whenever we have to deal with anything which is even semi-traumatic, whether it is finding a new job, confronting a divorce, or facing the death of a loved one, our first reaction is one of denial. But I would suggest that whenever we are faced with such a situation our real first reaction is that we hope that the problem will just go away on its own. And the larger the problem, the larger the hassle, the greater the wish for it to disappear.

So that in practice the only way that I am going to get you to even consider committing to the real changes necessary is to absolutely convince you that there are no other options available. Now, of course, this has been the goal of the last 58 episodes. On the other hand, though, it wouldn't be reasonable for me to expect that you've remembered each and every fact and each and every argument which I've made. And since so much of what I've laid out directly contradicts so many of the millions

of words you've read and heard throughout the rest of your life which have said just the opposite, that makes the odds of you having total recall of everything I've gone over even smaller.

Well, if that's the case, then always remember that those episodes are still up. And transcripts are also always available on the website, www.dialitbackordie.com

Anyway, I'll try to make it easier for you than even that. Because for the rest of this episode I'll be once again going over some of the reasons why there *aren't* any other real options available.

In the end, though, I'm still not so naive as to think that it is a simple matter to just drop the entire Western superstructure of ideology and replace it with something else. Because no matter how airtight and convincing I have been, you have been and will continue to be bombarded with the opposite message by the rest of the surrounding culture. And in such a situation it will be difficult not to start doubting yourself. It's very lonely being alone. And, as you'll recall from Episode 40, there is that famous social psychology experiment by Solomon Asch, where eleven confederates all said that the shorter arrow was longer, and then almost invariably the twelfth participant agreed with them. And a significant number of those twelfth participants ending up actually perceiving that this was indeed the case.

But there is also an important addendum to that experiment. Because when it was run with only ten confederates giving the false answer, but with one confederate giving the right one, the twelfth participant now almost invariably stuck to their guns and agreed with the obvious. Which means that you don't really need to get everyone to admit that the Emperor has no clothes. Just one or two or a few will do. And then it will be much easier for the proverbial scales to fall from all eyes.

Which, when you think about it, actually makes everything much more hopeful.

Anyway, with all of that in mind, let's now go through that check list of all those other options which will not work.

So... First I think it important to point out that you are going to die.

But that's all right. Because so am I. And me probably way before you.

And this is true even if we were to somehow create the perfect Earthly Paradise. At some point we would still have to leave it. There is simply no way that we're ever going to finesse our mortality.

But I'm not trying to be depressing here. And why should anyone get depressed about this reality? Because in the end mortality is just one of those unalterable features of the particular Universe which we find ourselves in. Like gravity. Or up and down quarks. Or the seeming anomaly in Physics

that Time only travels in one direction. Anyway, the only way that anyone could be immortal is if they were like those photons still traveling through space at the speed of light fourteen billion years after the Big Bang. Whatever eternal Now which does exist in the physical Universe can last only so long as the original energy doesn't ever coalesce into matter. By existing as matter here in this physical realm, by definition we are subject to the forces of entropy and to the binding limits of both Time and of Life.

Sorry if you were hoping for something different. But anyone's goal in Saving The World shouldn't have anything to do with any of us pretending that we can escape Death. Rather it should be so as to provide everyone to have a greater opportunity to live a peaceful and more harmonious life while we are still here.

So forget about life extension fantasies. Anyway, as of now, most science believes that the telomere degeneration in chromosomes and cells is an integral part of the life process, and that we are therefore basically stuck with our threescore and ten. After all, cells which reproduce forever and never die are what causes cancer. And as for those scientists who think that there might be some as yet unknown workaround? Well, even if there were, and you could then live to, say, 300, how would that essentially change the existential aspect of life, when compared to a Universe which is currently just under fourteen billion years old? Besides, if you had potentially hundreds of years ahead of you, wouldn't that make you incredibly risk averse to try anything which was even remotely adventurous? And, anyway, how many hot fudge sundaes does anyone really need to eat before they're over hot fudge sundaes?

And you can also forget about those science fiction ideas that either A) At some point in the near future computers will have evolved to be way more conscious than mere humans, and a sort of undefinable and immortal Singularity will then occur, Or B) individuals will be able to upload to the Cloud an electronic representation of themselves, and achieve a certain kind of immortality in that way.

Because entertaining science fiction stories are not science. After all, as I went to some lengths to point out earlier in the podcast, this idea that the way that computers work is some sort of analog to the way that human brains work is almost always a function of someone not actually knowing how computers work and/or not actually knowing how the human brain works. Even with recent advances in artificial intelligence, computers are still only in effect adding and subtracting extremely quickly. They are just making incredibly complicated statistical analysis, and not remotely 'understanding' anything. What's more, as I went over in Episode 25, the basic assumption that human consciousness

arises from purely mechanistic causes has never been remotely proven. And until and unless someone finally does that, then any speculation that arises from this assumption is utter fantasy.

Anyway, even in those science fiction scenarios, immortality only lasts so long as no one cuts the power supply.

So, and contrary to Irene Cara, you are not going to live forever. Nor is my proposed solution to the mess that we are in meant in any way to try to wriggle our way out of this existential truth. Again, sorry if you were hoping otherwise.

But raising the fact of our mortality does bring up an important point. Because there is what might be called a second existential paradox which is inherent in the human condition.

For as you may recall we've already covered the first existential paradox. This one arose from the fact that not only are human babies born at least a year premature, but that the most salient feature of this prematurity is that their giant, incredibly emotionally sensitive brains are way more conscious than those of other animals, but are not at all wired up yet. Which means that when they are born they are going through, to use the vernacular, a really bad trip. Which means that, were they to become at all aware of just how scary the outside world actually is, how violent and random animal existence is, they would—to again use the vernacular—literally freak. Which means that human mothers have necessarily had to evolve so as to be able to not only present to their babies and young children a fantasy reality where fierce bears are actually cute teddy bears, and where lions actually do lay down with the lambs, but to actually believe in such a world of peace and tranquility themselves.

And, of course, the reality of our being a hypersocial species, where over half of its members are women and children, then also requires such a vision and such a world. Which is then one of the strongest reasons why Civilization developed as it did.

But there's also a somewhat related existential paradox which is inherent in Civilization itself. Or, for that matter, which is inherent in any system of beliefs. Because the reason that we have systems of beliefs—which, when combined with tradition and culture, produce Civilization—is to provide stability, coherence, and continuity to each of our individual lives. And to do our best in creating the illusion of an ongoing and permanent sense of reality.

Yet the plain fact of our mortal existence is that we will each also individually die. And when that happens then so does that illusion.

Although this doesn't mean that there's any need to mope around like one of those European existentialists. Instead we can take a lesson from the ladies.

Because even though the human female's mental creation of a peaceful world that is not red in tooth and claw is in a certain sense fake and artificial, and is in denial as to how animal life has functioned on this planet for the past five hundred million years or so, in another sense it became real and plausible the moment that the first human female created it.

And although throughout this podcast I've been refraining from addressing the question as to whether or not there is meaning to the Universe, the point is that, even if there hadn't been any before we humans came along, that doesn't mean that we can't therefore create some. And, by definition, from then on there would be meaning.

So that, given our hypersocial nature, then the hypersocial organism called Civilization which we have created would seem to be a good place for us to imbue with any previously missing meaning. Not that Civilization itself would then actually become immortal. But as a practical matter, when compared to our absolutely ephemeral individual existences, well, then, yeah.

And I don't want to evoke Joseph Campbell and the mystical power of myths. Nor do I wish to look to comic books for any deep truths. But I would suggest that the reason why the fantasy of 'saving the world' is so widespread and powerful arises ultimately from that hypersocial nature, from a widely held inner need in many of us to make our society a better place than the one we found. Civic virtue and all that. And this need would be there even if the present culture weren't on the verge of disintegration.

The fact that it is, however, certainly would seem to give a special urgency to that inner urge.

Anyway, having said all that, and given just how heavy those chains are which are weighing on us right now, in fairness you still do have the option of doing Nothing. And I wouldn't necessarily even blame you if you chose to do that.

Because, after all of these episodes, if your reaction to all of this is still to throw your hands up in the air and run around shouting like Chicken Little, then I would suggest that you save your breath. If, after all this, you still believe that the answer somehow involves voting *them* out of office, or in some other way figuring out a way to change *them* instead of *you*, then do us all a favor, save yourself a whole lot of pointless energy, find a nice quiet little corner somewhere, and watch it all go bye bye. Because if you're listening to this, the odds are overwhelming that your life is far wealthier and your

life is far easier than just about any other human who has ever lived. And compared to virtually all other animal life which has ever existed? It's not even close. In effect you are right now staying in the most luxurious suite on the Titanic. So a good argument could be made that you should just enjoy the ride while it lasts.

Although we're assuming now that as a good human you would like to do something about our current state of affairs. And that, given a choice, you would probably prefer peace and harmony to the selfish chaos which we experience surrounding us. Well, if that is the case, then along with internalizing the reality of both our individual mortality and the fact that this isn't going away on its own, there's something else which should be obvious, but which we all need to fully bring to our consciousness and to fully accept. And that is this: There are no magic pills to swallow. There are no magic buttons to push.

Now, again, this should be more than obvious. But, being humans, besides always hoping that bad things will just go away on their own, we also tend towards hoping that something magical will show up that will make all the unpleasantness disappear. No, once again I'm truly sorry. But that's not the way these things work.

And in like manner there's also no point in waiting around for a Messiah to show up. Because even if one did, and even though their example of perfect living would indeed be inspirational, in the end they would just be telling us to effect the same changes in ourselves that every other spiritual teacher who has ever come along has told us. Their purpose in appearing would not be to wave that magic wand and make all of our sorrows disappear.

Nor, if God exists, is that the purpose of He, She, or It. Because, whatever Meaning there may be in the Universe, it most definitely is not to make all of anyone's particular dreams come true. If it were, God would have waved that magic wand a long time ago, and we wouldn't be where we are now, now would we? And I totally agree that at this moment in time a few lucky breaks would come in handy. But as with those magic pills, I don't think that there is a magic wand in the cards, either.

So now let me give a few examples of what I would call Chicken Little responses. Because even though on the surface they all appear as if they are urgently addressing an urgent problem, and even though most people who believe in them are no doubt sincere in their belief, these 'solutions' all share the attribute of being framed in such a way, and of being pursued in such a way, that it is difficult

to see how they could possibly be implemented. So that, whatever the conscious motivation, one suspects that what is really going on is a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing. It's as if people on the left, right, and center can all intuit the broader cultural collapse. At the same time, though, it would be too psychologically stressful for them to admit to the enormity of it. So they then take one aspect which they see, a symptom, and make this their crusade. But if this new crusade were then ever successful, on some level they also intuit that it would not really affect the broader cultural collapse, and then they would finally have to face *that*. Thus they proceed to pursue the crusade in such a way so that it will never succeed.

Follow? And, yes, I know that this comes across as somewhat convoluted and a little bit paranoid. But consider these examples:

First, let's look at what I would call the 'political' solutions. Now as I pointed out way back in the beginning of all this, the political right and the political left are in many ways like two warring factions of the same religion or of the same ideology. And this is because they actually are. Because when you scratch below the surface you'll find that they are each furiously proclaiming that they are the party which is all for 'personal freedom'. Now the people on the left may be saying that they want the personal freedom to have whatever kind of sex that they want. And the people on the right may be saying that they want the personal freedom to buy as big of a Hummer as they want. But to both sides 'personal freedom' is taken to be some sort of *prima facie a priori* obvious truth.

As I've been saying all along, though, the term 'personal freedom', while sounding so wonderful, is in reality code for 'unregulated selfishness'. And unregulated selfishness is never going to work in any way, shape, or form for a naturally hypersocial animal such as us. What's more, our two political sides are just fine with regulating the selfishness of the other side. After all, as I went over in the Science section, as hypersocial animals we also all have a highly evolved need to regulate, and to thus establish social norms. But it's an insult to our own intelligence to get all hot and bothered about regulating *them* when we react in horror at anyone's slightest suggestion of regulating *us*.

So that's the short answer as to why there is no political solution. But there's also something else involved. Because, as I've also pointed out before, ideology trumps common sense, it trumps science, it trumps reality itself. And you'll remember how people in the Soviet Union, when it had lost all of its fizz by the Seventies and Eighties, never blamed Marxism, but rather blamed themselves for

not implementing it correctly. Well, so, too, do many of our political types think that the answer to the chaotic hell that we've created lies in having *more* personal freedom, having *more* democracy.

And combined with that there is also what I pointed out in the last episode. Namely, that the closer that Liberal Democracy gets to being the only game in town, the more obvious it is that the happiness that it promised isn't happening. So that true believers then have to get ever angrier at every possible way that Liberal Democracy might have fallen short of 100% implementation. And in their minds, once this happens, *then* happiness will follow.

And, as true believers, they will never, ever admit to the possibility that maybe they were wrong.

Now finally, there are two other noteworthy elements to our particular political times. First, since each of the two sides is effectively the same size, this means that by far the most probable outcome will always be a perpetual tug of war without any clear winner. The second is that whenever either side does gain a temporary advantage, instead of consolidating that advantage by pursuing moderate goals, it immediately tries to implement policies guaranteed to alienate the middle, which then in turn makes it lose that advantage. Which then makes the system revert to gridlock.

What's more, when the two sides do talk they talk past each other. That is, they tend to each make valid points, but then they never begin to address the valid points which the other side makes.

All of which, whether intentional or not, results with nothing having been accomplished and nothing ever going to be accomplished. Performance art. Kabuki theater. Whatever.

And now let's talk about what we might call Displacement. That is, getting all worked up about an issue which is undeniably real and urgent, but which in the end is a side issue to the real problem. And a great example of this is climate change.

Yes, climate change is real. It might even be apocalyptic. But in scientific terms that 'might' is still a mighty big 'might'. So the 'Chicken Little' level of concern among so many people is rather strange. Especially since, if people really cared about solving it, they would then treat it not as something to freak out over, but rather as an urgent engineering problem. And a plausible solution would be fairly simple. For there are at least several completely safe, tested and approved, 'fourth generation' nuclear power plant designs which don't even have radioactive waste. So fifteen years ago we could have taken one of the designs, and then mass produced hundreds of replicas around the world.

Simultaneously we could have made the relatively simple switch of running cars on natural gas instead of petroleum. In short order most carbon emissions would have ceased.

Of course, a simple plan such as this was never even considered. And this is because the same people who were so angry at those who didn't accept established climate science themselves didn't accept established nuclear science. Instead they pushed for much harder to achieve goals such as wind and solar, which even now only make sense if one assumes that the sun is always shining and the wind is always blowing. Plus, instead of doing what easily could have been done, they pushed for massive Utopian worldwide behavioral changes, such as creating a whole new infrastructure for electric vehicles. Which still have that slight problem of running out of juice.

So one has to ask oneself again: Is anyone really serious about this? Or is it all just some sort of performance art?

Further, what difference would it really make to society if you had a smart climate policy but still had a stupid culture? And if the climate problem is ultimately a function of uncontrolled consumption, then wouldn't greater energy efficiency just result in even greater consumption? Which would end up with us back in the same situation?

Okay. So how about possible economic cures for what ails us?

And there's no denying that we do have pressing economic problems, the most obvious one these days being that of economic inequality. One of the issues here, though, is that although all of us have seen examples of the deserving poor, we've also seen examples of the undeserving poor. Likewise, although there are plenty of cases of the undeserving rich, there are also many instances of rich people who really did earn their rewards.

By far the larger issue, though, is that after these 58 episodes, do you really think that economic forces are the root causes of the mess that we are in? Instead hasn't the real cause been our enshrining of economic thinking itself as the centerpiece of our mindset and worldview? So that isn't imagining that there is now some kind of economic cure kind of like keeping on digging that hole that you've dug yourself into?

Again, it's not that these and other issues are not serious ones. All too often, though, it seems as if people use the seriousness of the issue just as an excuse for themselves to be really angry. At that somebody else who is the always available: Namely *Them*.

Which brings us to the final option that won't work. Being angry. Or, even worse, proposing some sort of violent solution.

And it's not like I'm rejecting violence out of some absolutist pacifist stance. After all, absent our hypersocial need to cooperate and the Civilization which it produced, the world of existence is a violent place. What's more, given the strength and the depth of Society's present dopamine addiction, it is hard to imagine all of humanity voluntarily deciding to kick the habit and proceed upon the straight and narrow. Further, as you'll recall from Episode 43 and the moral life of babies, toddlers will actively physically punish those puppets which act selfishly. So on some level if the carrots don't work, then a stick does need to be available.

What's more, given the levels of injustice and dishonesty which can arise, there is a time and a place for righteous anger.

But my objection to violent change is a practical one. After all, consider Marxism. Because it is difficult to see through its century long manifestation of violence and death, and to realize that it was originally supposed to lead to a peaceful, Utopian future. But, given Marx's assumptions about economics and class, it did logically follow that the rich would never willingly give up their privilege. And that therefore even someone with a naturally peaceful disposition, if he was a committed Marxist, would have to approve of violence as a necessary, if temporary, evil.

But that's the thing about violence. It's hard to keep it temporary. And it is the rare individual who can turn it off so easily. Worse, any movement which advocates violence, even for praiseworthy ends, brings to the front those individuals of a naturally violent bent.

However, the largest reason to avoid violence is that, simply put, there is no way that peace and harmony can ever be implemented by people who aren't peaceful and harmonious themselves. Now this doesn't mean that one is looking for leaders like Ned Flanders or Stuart Smiley or Mister Rogers. Someone can be vigorous and strong and also be seeking peace and harmony. And we'll be getting to that vision soon enough.

In fact, we'll be getting to it immediately. Because I could go on and on for episode after episode still trying to convince you that change is imperative and that we are the only people who can do it. But if the 300,000 words of this podcast has not yet accomplished that, then 300,000 more won't accomplish it, either. And, personally, I'm really tired of having to endlessly describe all of this decay.

So with this episode the end of this dying world is over. And next episode we're finally going to show you how to bring about that new one.

In the meantime, though, I would like to thank you this one more time for so far, and for so long, having listened.