

EPISODE 65

DIALING IT BACK

Hi there. Welcome to the beginning of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 65 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. At this point we're really, truly near the end of all this. And, as promised last episode, today I'm going to really, truly lay out all of the totally inconvenient truths as to what we're going to have to do, the parameters which are going to have to be set, and the disciplines we're going to have to learn, if we want to have any sort of realistic chance of getting ourselves out of the cultural mess which we have gotten ourselves into.

Now, although many of you have immediately 'gotten' what's behind my having chosen the semi-whimsical title 'Dial It Back Or Die' for this podcast, there is occasionally concern or puzzlement. After all, what kind of P.R. is there in putting the word 'die' in a title? What's more, most of these episodes have been serious discussions of history and science and all. So why muck it up with a title which is even semi-whimsical?

Well, from my vantage point, if you can't be at least semi-whimsical, even in the face of death, then you're probably not going to stand much of a chance of stepping outside of your preexisting belief system, and to look at all of the evidence from a different perspective. And the reason that I've been going over all of this history and science has not been to just show off or to entertain you. Rather it has been because, considering that most of us have had a more or less lifelong immersion in those preexisting beliefs, I will only succeed in converting you if I first offer you a long, slow accumulation of evidence.

Anyway, if I haven't convinced you by now not only of the drastic need for society to change, but also of the drastic need for you—yes, you—to change, then I don't know what else I can do. So that now it's time for me to say, as the bad guy often says in the movies, 'Now: You can choose to do this the easy way, or you can choose to do it the hard way. Either way it's gonna go down.' Except that, in the movies there's always some unexpected miracle which saves the good guy. But as I keep trying to tell you, this ain't the movies. This is real. And in real life the reason that they're called 'miracles' is because they virtually never happen.

And now for what I am about to present. Because you can look at it as an opportunity for greater self-discipline, for communal self improvement, for the restoration of those incredibly important social norms, and for a return to the wisdom of Classical Civilization. Or you can look at it as some insane attempt to erase a half century of ‘progress’, for an imposition of a super authoritarian Big Brother, and for a retreat back to to a sexist, Puritan past. But make no mistake. One way or another, in the future somebody *is* going to control you. Now that somebody might be on the order of a Kim Jung Un or a Xi Jinping. Or it might be someone on the order of a Jeff Bezos or a Mark Zuckerberg. But there’s no way that, given our high tech world of today, as it’s presently constituted, you are not going to end up as a subject in some sort of surveillance state.

I mean, don’t blame me for the social and political and technological and every other kind of mess that we are in today. If anything, for the past fifty years I’ve been a guy on the sidelines jumping up and down and saying, ‘You don’t want to go down that road!’ And now that you and I and everyone else is down that road, I’m just trying to figure out a way to still save us.

After all, remember the libertarian fantasy world envisioned by Silicon Valley some twenty-five years ago? The internet was being proselytized as a platform which would give each and every one of us almost infinite individual rights. And what has it become today? A cesspool of anger and trivialization and vicious social shaming, filled with inane images of what somebody had for lunch, and an even more inane army of influencers. And another army of ‘hate speech’ censors, whose definition of ‘hate speech’ oh so coincidentally happens to track perfectly with the censors’ particular political outlooks. While meanwhile Alexa and Siri and all of their friends no doubt monitor your every word, even when you think that you’ve turned them off.

And it might well scare you that China is putting up literally millions of closed circuit TV cameras so as to be able to watch each and every citizen all of the time. But you know what country already did this over ten years ago? England. And there they love having their lives totally intruded upon.

So Big Brother is already watching. Big Brother is already hoovering up the information on every website that you ever go to, every purchase that you ever make. And guess what? So far no one seems to care.

But here’s an idea: What if in real life you had grown up with a big brother. And he was a really nice guy who was concerned about your health, was concerned about your safety and how you were

doing, and was always making sure to watch out for you. As long as he wasn't overbearing, you'd probably really like that, now wouldn't you?

Okay, so that's where I'm going with this. Because we have to accept the plain fact that there's no way around the reality that the future is going to be, at least in postmodern terms, authoritarian. And there's also, for reasons which I went over in an earlier episode, going to be some sort of oligarchy which really runs the show. And once we accept this plain reality, then obviously the only way forward is to try to ensure that it will be a truly benevolent authoritarianism. And a truly benign oligarchy.

So how do we do *that*? Well, first I'll readily admit there is no airtight, ironclad way to guarantee that things will never go sideways. But you know what? When you look at history it's clear that this has always been the case. What's more, it is most probable that it will always remain that way. And, as I have been mentioning, this truth is especially true with Democracy. Most countries which have 'democratic' systems, which did not already start out middle class, are typically distinguished by their dysfunction, corruption, and gridlocked, ineffectual legislatures. (Whereas Singapore, with its somewhat authoritarian pseudo-democracy, as mentioned, is the least corrupt country in the world. And in Africa the two countries which have most emphatically rejected the 'Liberal Democracy' model, and instead adopted the Singapore/China model, namely Rwanda and Ethiopia, have each far less corruption, and also far more impressive economic growth, than in the rest of the continent.)

And I'm most definitely not being starry eyed here about either Singapore or China. As of now, they have been remarkably successful. And their populations in general strongly approve. But who knows? It could always go haywire tomorrow. Eternal vigilance and all that.

Anyway, since, especially in the future, we will always have to trust the people running the show, and not the political ideology itself, then it behooves us to work so as to best ensure that those folks are the ones best suited to deliver 'what the people want'. And in that regard it would most definitely help if we have a clear understanding of what it is that people really do want from those who rule them. Because, remember from back in high school. In reality there is really not that much of the population which cares about putting too much time and attention into what we touchingly call 'the political process'. What's more, studies have shown that, given the vast number of unrelated issues which are addressed by the political process, any individual's views are usually all over the place. So that even thinking that everyone should line up as either 'left' or 'right', or as Republican or Democrat, is a fool's proposition.

Instead, so long as certain traits and properties which they really want out of a smoothly functioning society are addressed, then it turns out that ‘the people’ are quite happy to be ruled by whatever oligarchy and by whatever specific form of government is in charge.

And what are those traits and properties? Glad you asked. Because to a large extent that is what the Science section was all about. (Although I’ll also be adding some insights from Social Psychology on leadership that I didn’t have time to go over back then. Not to mention that much of what I will be saying was also just common wisdom for the past several millennia.)

First, ‘what the people want’ is safety, security, and non-violence. After all, since we are about the only animal which understands that there is going to be a future, we also would like to have a reasonable certainty that this future will remain at least somewhat like the present. Otherwise things get too confusing. And where there is uncertainty there is also fear. Further, given how long it takes for a human child to grow up, and given all of the health and physical dangers which exist even under the best of circumstances, mothers especially need an assurance of cultural and political stability.

Women also, given their relative lack of physical strength, and given that they lack the testosterone which is responsible for men’s greater assertiveness, are much more dependent upon society to provide both physical and emotional security. Although men are certainly not immune from this need, either. After all, remember all of the tricky balances (not the least of which is just being able to walk upright) which humans are required to maintain just to be able to coexist in a hypersocial civilization. And so there also have to be social mechanisms in place so that disputes, which will inevitably arise, especially between males, can be handled in a, well, civilized manner.

In fact, for a society to work, especially a modern society, it has to become as non-violent as possible in thought, word, and deed. And I don’t have time right now to go into all of the fake science which purports that we can indulge in all of the violent imagery and fantasy that we want without it affecting our own thoughts and behavior. I will just remind you that strong claims, such as this, especially ones which go against common experience and common wisdom, such as this, need very strong proof. And I will also remind you that the Scientism which is behind Liberal Democracy, by denying the existence of Qualities, and by only affirming Quantities which can be measured, sets it up so that in the end, in such a society, only intensity of experience, not quality of experience, will matter. And, further, that in a purely ‘free market’, without constraints from above, what will attract the most eyeballs, and thus sell the most product, other than violence?

In fact, let me suggest that when you start playing around with fantasies of violence, you are, figuratively and literally, playing around with a loaded gun. Because the plain fact is that whenever there have been instances when feelings of safety and security have broken down, and/or violent crime is on the rise, ‘the people’ will be all too happy to have ultra-authoritarians, even Bolsheviks and Nazis, take over. Because then, even if the new regime violently enforces really draconian laws, the mass of people will know that, so long as they obediently follow those laws, feelings of safety and security will return. And the more unsettled that they were before the takeover, then the more willingly they will acquiesce.

And you really need to know that even if you, say, have statistics that show that the murder rate is dramatically down over the last twenty years, it won’t mean squat if other aspects of safety—of feelings of cultural security, that social norms are still being followed, or that the future will be sufficiently stable and predictable—have evaporated.

But safety and security are not all that ‘the people’ need. They also need to know that those who are ruling them (and there will always be some group of rulers) are both competent and actually in control. What’s more, they need to know that those rulers are actually paying attention to what the people need and desire. Not that those in authority have to necessarily kowtow to and cater to every last popular wish, since most of us have been around long enough to recognize that not everything that everyone wants is always good for them. But the masses most definitely do need to have a sense that there is a strong hand on the tiller, and that the common good is the sincere goal of the leadership. And, given that, they will usually be more than willing to follow leaders who otherwise might seem to be even dictatorial in their personalities.

And following this line of thought, it is highly important that those who rule the roost exude a sense of personal modesty, and keep the outward perks of leadership to a minimum. Even more important, they, and the rest of the system, need to be seen as non-corrupt. After all, as pointed out in Episodes 41 to 44, a sense of fairness, of fair play, of equality, and of justice, are all actually pre-programmed into our brains in the womb. And although many societies have existed, and continue to exist, which horribly violate these standards, any society which does violate them will always be instantly intuitively invalid to our hypersocial selves.

And then there is the requirement, especially for men, that citizens have both a sense of self-respect and a sense that their government respects them. And the reason that I emphasize *men* here has to do with what I pointed out back in Episode number 49. Because remember that for the past 500

million years or so, for whatever reason, animals have reproduced sexually. And the way that the male/female dichotomy has worked out in practice has been that males are hyper-competitive with each other. Which means that those animal societies which have existed, from bees and ants on up to elephants and dolphins, have been pretty much, outside of the mating season, male free. And those social species which do include males almost always have well defined pecking orders, with alpha males and the like. With the result that those males on the bottom are often completely stressed out. And meanwhile even those at the top have the continual stress of always being one fight away from being replaced, and then instantly ending up on the bottom themselves.

So that for human males to be able to coexist in a non-heirarchical way (especially when compared with other species), another of those delicate balancing acts is required. That hard to define quality of mutual respect and mutual self-respect has to be there. Otherwise, as in cases such as prison or the inner city, when the sense of being respected is no longer there, social groups quickly degenerate into the 'king of the mountain' behavior of so many other species.

Although one doesn't need to get as extreme as a prison environment in order to destroy that sense of mutual respect. You can also get there through a suffocating bureaucracy, through a justice system that no longer allows for mercy or for individual differences or circumstances, through a police force which has become overly militarized. Or most especially through an ideology which sees all humans as technically equal, but also as ideologically stripped of that requirement for self-respect.

But the need for self-respect isn't the only trade off which is required in order for human males to adapt to non-heirarchical social, not to mention hypersocial, living. Allied with this is a need for a sense of autonomy. Although this, as I've been saying throughout, is a really tricky balance to maintain in the context of that hypersocial living. Too much autonomy, and the sense of community falls apart. Too little, and it all starts to feel like slavery. And it's not like women are completely immune from these needs, either. For everyone, though, if the ideology sees the population as merely an accumulation of equivalent consumption units, and does not even recognize the existence of a need for this autonomy/community balance, then all of the supposed 'freedom' of unlimited consumer choices or 'freedom' of unlimited sexual behavior patterns becomes meaningless.

So all of these qualities are what 'the people' actually want to be provided by the government which governs them. And I would like to reiterate that I'm not under any illusion that creating a system

that nurtures a ruling class which is modest, competent, and actually working to promote the greater good is any kind of easy matter.

But in the present times Singapore, although admittedly a small place, has been able to do it. In the past the Roman Empire was able to mostly achieve this through the vigorous inculcation of Civic Virtue among the aristocracy. For well over a thousand years Ancient China was able to achieve this through only choosing administrators, etc., from the results of a rigorous meritocratic exam. And trying to solve this problem was no doubt one of the principal struggles of our Founding Fathers.

And it is extremely important for you to remember that in none of these examples was any attention paid to conforming to some preexisting ideology. Whereas whenever that has been the framework, whether the ideology was Marxism or Liberal Democracy or whatever, the result has always been that the leaders have become venal and corrupt, and the typical citizen has lost that sense of self-respect and autonomy. Perceptions of fairness and justice evaporate. And dysfunction inevitably occurs.

So, purely as a practical matter, if we are trying to recreate a society which works, we need to ask ourselves how to restore a sense that these essential values of fairness and justice, etc., exist, and we most definitely don't want to ask how to create more 'Democracy' or 'individual freedom'.

Okay. For the last few episodes I have been dissing democracy. But now I would like to point out that there are two aspects of it which might well be valuable. And the best way to explain the first aspect is to use the analogy of instant cake mixes.

You see, in the 1950s instant cake mixes, such as Betty Crocker, were all the rage. All that the housewife had to do was to add water. And always at least one egg. But dehydrated eggs could have easily been added to the mix. And the freshness of the egg didn't make any difference to the taste. So why didn't, say, General Mills just add dehydrated egg to the mix and make the whole process even simpler for the housewife?

Because, as it turns out, manufacturers found that housewives still wanted to *feel* like they were baking and creating food. Even though of course they no longer were. So that requiring them to add that egg made it seem to them that they still had agency, that they were still actively participating in the baking process.

Even though of course they weren't.

And voting also achieves that purpose, in that the voter feels like they are participating in the government which runs their life. Even though, outside the context of a small group, in any practical sense, they don't. Which is why even outright dictatorships often continue the charade of voting. Why even Communist states often called themselves 'Democratic Republics'. And why our old time, traditional American democracy usually had political parties which, on the vast spectrum of political thought, were in practice very close to being Tweedledee and Tweedledum. Because then emotional debates and rallies could be held, intense opinions and arguments would ensue, votes would be cast, and in the end the overall system would pretty much remain the same.

But there's also a perhaps even more important benefit of having everyone vote. After all, remember how the Roman Empire, which really did not care one whit what anyone's religious beliefs or lack of same were, still required that every citizen perform annual sacrifices to the Roman gods? Because it was a civic duty. And this common civic duty, performed by all ethnicities, from England to Portugal to Armenia, was a key means to bind all Romans together.

In like manner, having all citizens physically going to the polls on the same day to cast ballots which, individually at least, are totally meaningless, nonetheless binds those people to the commonality of being Americans. Or Germans, or Israelis, or whoever. So that in effect it is not really your vote which matters. Rather it is that physical process of going to vote, of standing in line, of physically placing your ballot into the ballot box. A civic duty. (Which, by the way, becomes less and less meaningful the more that there is early voting, mail in voting, on line voting, or anything else which dilutes the communal activity.)

So those are two good reasons why the process of voting could be valuable. But, you may ask, even if the 'will of the people' shouldn't be equated to truth or wisdom, shouldn't the wise rulers of your ideal society at least be interested, both in what the people want and how they are reacting to the actions of those rulers? Yes, of course they should be. But as I've already pointed out, they can do this far more easily and accurately by conducting honest polling research. After all, the way statistics and probability work is that a random sample of a thousand will give you just as accurate a reading of the 'popular will' as does a vote of 300 million.

And, again, not that I'm shilling for the Chinese government, but this is exactly what they do. They don't need no stinkin' democracy because, in fact, they relentlessly poll. And, much as it may be hard for you to believe that 'Communists' would actually care about the people they rule, why else do you think that the country keeps forging ahead at breakneck speed, why the rulers are putting so many

resources into non-stereotypically Marxist concerns, such as the environment and health care, and why, in honest polling, the Chinese people consistently give their leaders 70-80% approval?

Anyway, all of the aforementioned leads us to by far the most important quality which ‘the people’ really require. And this is our old friend, social norms. Because although social glue—along with wisdom, happiness, or creativity—is not yet quantifiable, this does not mean that social glue is not only real, but also utterly central to our hypersocial sense of being. And when it is gone we end up like those children who, during a critical stage of their infancy, were kept in cold, dark rooms away from their mothers.

So that in the end, if you take away nothing else from this podcast, you really, really need to know that, without social glue, then everything—country, culture, civilization—it all falls apart. Further, you really, really, really need to know that the only way that you can have that social glue is through those clear, strongly enforced social norms.

Now a slogan that you sometimes hear nowadays is ‘Unity through Diversity’. And I’m sorry if I’m the one who has to tell you this, but as it applies to social norms: What a load of crock. Millions of years of evolution aren’t going to change just because somebody utters a slogan. Our genetic makeup isn’t going to instantly adapt in order to fit somebody’s totally unscientific ideology. As I keep endlessly pointing out, we are only about ten thousand years into this hypersocial thing. Social glue and common middle class bourgeois values are why 250 strangers of 100 different nationalities can get on a plane in Dubai, and can get off in London or Moscow or Beijing many hours later with nary a discouraging word.

And when you start messing with that glue or those commonly held, traditional bourgeois values, bad things are going to happen. Which is, of course, what this entire podcast has been about.

And the only way that we’re going to recover that social glue is to re-institute those commonly held, traditional bourgeois values. So—once again, folks—we can do this the easy way or the hard way. The easy way is to more or less voluntarily reset our cultural parameters to about where they were sixty or seventy years ago. Singapore or Shanghai, as opposed to Las Vegas or South Beach. The alternative is a sort of woke totalitarianism, which is the natural end point of Liberal Democracy. Either that or some kind of vicious snap back, such as what happened a century ago when the Bolsheviks and the Nazis each stepped into the breach caused by their ‘anything goes’ societies.

So, finally, here's how tight the parameters are going to have to be. And, since they might well freak you out, let me add one last time that these parameters have nothing to do with my particular religion or lack of same, nor with my innate prudishness or lack of same. For, and not meaning to either brag or confess, more than many of you, I have been most everywhere and done most everything. I am most definitely not Ned Flanders.

In fact, if reality really was the make believe playland which Utilitarianism and Liberal Democracy imagines, then I myself would find much of what I am about to say terribly constricting, also. But this all too real train wreck that's going on isn't fantasy. What's more, our innate evolutionary and psychological constraints are all too real. We can't wish them away any more than we can wish away our inevitable mortality.

No, these parameters are what's going to be needed if we, and by 'we' I mean, at this point, the entire world, are ever going to be even able to sustain a hope that we can get to the other side of this darkness. And if it does seem way too strict, or Puritan, to your postmodern ears, please be advised that up until sixty or seventy years ago there was virtually no one on the face of this Earth who would have argued about them.

What's more, the vast majority of the population on the continents of Africa and Asia still agree with these parameters. And so does either a silent majority or a significant minority in all of the other corners of the world. In fact, many of them would think that even my parameters are too loose.

And I would probably be pretty safe in betting a large amount of money with you that if there ever were a free and fair election of the entire population of our planet concerning these parameters, then what with all of the billions of people who still believe in traditional Christianity and traditional Islam and traditional Hinduism, that the outcome wouldn't even be close.

And so here are those parameters which need to exist:

Number 1: The entire world's culture has to become PG rated.

Number 2: We have to acknowledge once again the innate differences of the sexes, and the innate complementarity of Yin and Yang.

Number 3: Sex needs to return to the bedroom. And the only valid social norm for sexual relations has to be heterosexual monogamy.

Number 4: Faith in a Higher Power has to once again become the default value.

Now I'm not going to just leave it at that. Indeed the last few episodes will consist of me explaining why these parameters are what they are, and why they need to be so strict as to sound, at least to postmodern ears, as overly constricting. Because I hope that at least some of you, at least intuitively, will have immediately grasped the truth of what I am saying. Even if no one else, outside of Church ladies, ever dares to say it these days. So at least a few of you will be immediately okay with this.

But I also fully expect that others will very sincerely think that I am flat out wrong about this. Or that, even if I were right, then, given the postmodern world's state of mind, there's just way too much toothpaste splattered out all over everything to ever get even a part of it back into even a giant tube.

Which means that all of those folks no doubt think that I've still got a lot of explaining to do.

Well, I'll try my best. And I would ask you to therefore bear with me for these last few episodes.

Which, as always, will be coming soon enough.

In the meantime, though, that is it for today. And once more I would like to thank you once more for once more having so thoroughly listened.