

## Mission Statement

The Fellowship of Reason® is an open, benevolent, and vital rational moral community in which we celebrate our lives, our freedoms, and our philosophy of reason.

## Ladies and Gentlemen

I have been studying The Republic of Plato at the Invisible College under the guidance of philosopher Greg Johnson. Next quarter we will study Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. The Aristotle class begins Tuesday, March 28 for those interested.

Anyway, Plato and his interlocutors construct an ideal "city in speech." Plato suggests that very few laws will be needed in his ideal city because "it isn't worth-while to dictate to gentlemen." (425e) Plato defines a gentleman as a person whose soul is fine, noble, beautiful, and good.

I have also heard the term "civil society" used lately. One source (<http://www.impacs.bc.ca/about.htm>) describes civil society as "the space between the state and the market where people join together to share ideas and take collective action."

Finally, I started reading Aristotle's Rhetoric. The introduction to the Penguin Classic translation suggests that the formal study of the art of rhetoric became important in the context of the democracy of Athens around 450 BC. The people would meet as a body numbering in the thousands in the Assembly to enact laws. A person desiring to obtain the consent of the people to his proposal was required to persuade the people by speech. Aristotle divides the methods of persuasion into three categories—appeals to the emotions of the listener, rational demonstration, and the character of the speaker.

Here, then, are the ideas: gentlemen, civil society, democratic persuasion, and character as an element of persuasion.

I never fully understood why it was important to be a gentleman or a lady before. I thought the formal training for cotillion in high school foolish. But if being a gentleman or a lady is seen as a way of obtaining access to other people in order to trade with them or to persuade them, then being a gentleman or lady can be appreciated as a matter of life and death.

Here are the only options for human relations according to the philosophy of Objectivism: We can deal with other

people or not. If we are to deal with them, that relationship can be either voluntary (based upon persuasion) or involuntary (based upon force). Benevolent Objectivists chose to deal with other people voluntarily.

Civil society, then, is a society of conventions (rules made up by men), the purpose of which is to facilitate voluntary commerce, both market and social.

A person who adheres to the conventions of civility and courtesy is wearing, as it were, a sign that says, "I know the rules of human intercourse. I want to play with you." Such a person lets others know that he may have good character and, therefore, that he may be a good candidate for market or social commerce.

The two extremes in society then would be the gentleman and the barbarian. The barbarian is the person who deals with others by force. He just bashes the other over the head, if he can, and takes what he wants. The gentleman or lady is the self-aware, self-responsible, self-fulfilling person who is open to voluntary intercourse with other gentlemen and ladies and who exhibits that openness.

I suggest that rudeness and incivility should always be avoided on survival grounds. Imagine yourself driving on the freeway in Los Angeles. A driver cuts you off in traffic. You wave your fist in the air and scowl at him in protest. The other pulls out his .357 magnum revolver and blows your head off. Remember there are two prototypes—gentlemen and barbarians. Don't invite war with a barbarian. Ladies and gentlemen, generally, are ill-equipped for war.

I do not suggest that you should endure every insult. When I am mistreated at a business in a minor way not worthy of talking to the manager given my circumstances, I may take my business elsewhere forevermore. I have never returned to Blimpies following an unpleasant incident in college, for example. Isn't capitalism great! In other words, remember the options: deal with others or don't deal with others. If you deal with others, deal with them by persuasion rather than by force. It is often best simply to discretely shun people who harm you in minor emotional ways.

If a person does something that requires a response, such as a racial slur, a prompt verbal distancing of yourself from the speaker ("I don't share your opinion.") combined with the physical removal of yourself from the immediate presence of that person is a forceful message. Shunning works.

In the Fellowship of Reason® we have embraced the virtue of benevolence. A lady or gentleman is a benevolent person.

One of the biggest problems in society today is a lack of ladies and gentlemen.

### **April's Celebration of Heroes**

We will have a very personal Celebration of Heroes by Vera that should not be missed.

### **Celebration on Sunday, April 2, 2000**

Our next Celebration is on Sunday, April 2, 2000, at 12:30 p.m. upon the grounds of the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

### **So far this is the lineup for March 2000:**

Welcome  
Celebration of Freedom—Martin  
Celebration of Visitors  
Celebratory Announcements  
Celebration of Each Other  
Ellen's Corner—Ellen  
Celebration of Art—Linda C.  
Celebration of Heroes—Vera  
Celebration of Talent—Linda S. (maybe)  
Oratory—Martin—"What is a noble soul?"  
Celebration of Amateur Talent—Linda S. (maybe)  
Celebration of Personal Mission—?  
Spiritual Exercise—?  
Closing Quotation

### **FOR's market position**

I have created a draft of a handout for visitors that is intended to explain where FOR fits in the constellation of Atlanta organizations. Your input is requested. Please note that I do not intend to criticize any group with this document. I seek your reaction to the document with that in mind.

### **Contact information:**

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