

## 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.

### When I suffer, it is always my fault

I have discovered that when I suffer, I have done something wrong. If one generalizes this discovery, perhaps he or she will find the secret to happiness.

I bought a new truck on Memorial Day. Everything went wrong. Linda had been wanting a new car for months. I tried to talk her out of it by arguing the benefits of ten-year-old vehicles with no payments which functioned adequately. A week before our purchase I replaced a worn out component on my old truck. While at the dealership, I looked at the new trucks. Nice! Despite my frugal talk, I went shopping again. We were driving to Florida for a vacation the next day. A new truck sure would make the trip more pleasant. So, on the spur of the moment, we bought a new truck.

Suddenly, I had waves of buyer's remorse. Did I get a fair trade-in price? Did I get enough off the sticker price? Did they give me all the equipment that was supposed to come with the options I had purchased? Now we have a huge truck payment. I found that, because I had not read the forms, I had filled out the mileage declaration incorrectly. My new leather seat did not feel right. "Oh, what to do? What to do? I want my good, old truck back."

Ancient Greek philosophers, including Aristotle, believed that happiness was a function of right living, or life lived in accordance with virtue. I have, in an effort to be happy, posted on the wall a list of virtues. They are: **courage, grandness, nobility, wisdom, powerfulness, magnanimity, generosity, and benevolence.**

One must deliberately choose virtue every day. After a time, virtue becomes a habit. I have not yet habituated virtue.

I worried about my truck problems for two weeks. Finally, I noticed my list of virtues and **it occurred to me to apply virtue to my problems.** Imagine that!

The first virtue on my list is courage. In this context courage means to take the consequences of your actions. "My God, Martin, be a man. You bought the damn thing. Accept what you have done and live with it. It can not be

undone." My spirits rose. "I am a man. I have courage. I know what it means to take responsibility for my actions.

So, what facts must I take responsibility for?

First of all, I was concerned that a subsequent buyer might be misled by my errors in completing the mileage declaration form. I wrote to the dealer to correct the error. No response. I called the state office to seek advice. They said *call* the dealer. I called the dealer and they had already sold the vehicle to a wholesaler, but they had called their buyer and had notified him of the error. They faxed me a copy of the title. Still not satisfied and concerned that a retail customer might be misled, I noticed the name of the used car dealer that had my truck. I drove to the dealer's lot and found my truck. I spoke with the owner and got him to correct the mileage declaration form. Total satisfaction, pure and simple.

None of these steps was easy. I felt fear at every step, especially driving into the used car dealer's lot. I overcame my fears with **courage** and with the knowledge that **truth is important.**

How did I err? I have a grievous fault that I struggle with every day. From my years as a lawyer dealing with conflict, I now abhor conflict. Avoiding reading the sales documents and trusting the salesman was my way of avoiding making a legal judgment. Had I attended to what I was doing fully (buying a car), I would have carefully read each and every document before I signed and made a lawyerly judgment about my actions.

My mistake cost me weeks of suffering, letters, telephone calls, and an automobile trip to correct my error.

Second, I was concerned that I had not made a good deal. What were the facts? My truck had a retail value higher than the trade-in value I received. The new truck had a 13% invoice mark up. Did I get a good deal? Well, at this point the question is academic. The deal is done and cannot be undone. But these considerations apply: We tried to sell our boat by ourselves for 34 months without success. The effort cost us \$50,000. Finally, a competent dealer sold the boat for us at a fair price and earned his 10% commission. We are believers in using car dealers and real estate agents to buy or sell cars or land. The truck I bought is in high demand. We did negotiate for the truck to the point of walking out of the dealership.

I paid a fair price. Though the next time I will do my research **before** I buy.

Finally, what about the seat and the part? I asked the salesman about the part. He said it did not come with the option. I bought the truck knowing that. Also, I did not buy the truck because of the option (a towing package) and I do not anticipate a need for it in the near future. "Live with it, Martin boy." I called the service department about the seat. They said they could adjust it. I am getting used to it anyway. I may just forget about it.

It is after all a very nice truck.

What have I learned? Nothing really new. I am just **reminded** about the importance of living virtuously every day.

- Choose what you want and pay for it. (Courage)
- Fully attend to what you are doing when you are doing it. (Powerfulness)
- Know all the relevant facts before you act. (Wisdom)

A person whose house is destroyed by a meteorite is not responsible for his unhappy circumstance. A person who has a genetic illness is not responsible for his unhappy circumstance. Short of chance occurrences though, I find that I am responsible for my unhappy circumstances.

One must be virtuous in order to be happy. Virtue is completely within everyone's volitional control. If you are unhappy in any area of your life, consider the possibility that you are unhappy, not from some external circumstance, but from your personal failure to act virtuously in some particular circumstance. If so, learn from your failure.

Make moral progress today and be happier for it.

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## Aristotle's City

Aristotle says the best regime should look after the character of its citizens.

In his Politics Aristotle says that people come together to live in the city, not "for the sake of life alone but rather for the sake of living well." Furthermore, he suggests that citizens must be "concerned about what each other's character should be...." A true city "must make virtue its care." "Such things are the work of friendship, for the deliberate choice to live together is friendship. The end, then, of the city is living well, ... and a city is the community of families and villages in a complete and self-sufficient life, which, we say, is living happily and nobly."

Hundreds of small city-states existed in ancient Greece. Aristotle documented 158 constitutions of those city-states. Only the constitution of Athens remains extant. These cities existed in order to protect the citizens from outside invaders and to provide dispute resolution mechanisms to smooth social relations. Yet despite hundreds of known regimes to pick from Aristotle gives not one single real-life example of his best regime. The city that cares for the character of its citizens did not exist in Aristotle's time.

Is Aristotle's city to be found today in Smyrna, Rex, Locust Grove, or Douglasville? How about in Buckhead, Sandy Springs, or Dunwoody?

Perhaps Aristotle's city is a utopia. Utopia means in the Greek "not a place."

In metropolitan Atlanta, we have no fear of foreign invasion, thanks to the United States military. Our local and state governments provide police protection and courts. Like the ancient Greek city-states, our local, state, and Federal governments protect us from foreign and internal violence and fraud.

The business of character, though, belongs to whom or to what institution? Certainly, every individual should exercise concern and care of his or her own character. Yet how many individuals actually do make an effort at personal moral *progress*? Do any social institutions exist to assist individuals in the care of his or her character? Yes.

Moral communities exist to assist individuals in the care of their character. In moral communities the members encourage one another to make personal moral *progress*.

It appears then that Aristotle's city is a utopia. It does not have a "place" in the sense of the walled ancient city-state. Aristotle's city does, though, in fact exist. **Aristotle's city exists in moral communities.** Moral communities serve the most important function of Aristotle's city—the care of character.

Given our modern conception of individual rights, we certainly prefer that the care of character be vested in a *voluntary* organization rather than in *compulsory* government. Furthermore, moral credit exists only where one *chooses* to make moral *progress*. Morality ends at the muzzle of a gun, as Ayn Rand said.

We, the members of the Fellowship of Reason®, come together *voluntarily* for the sake of living well. We care, *voluntarily*, about virtue. We make a deliberate choice to live together. We encourage each other, *voluntarily*, to make personal moral progress. We make personal moral progress *voluntarily*.

## The History of Ideas

### "The Muttnick Principle"

In antiquity psychology was contained within the discipline of philosophy. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were concerned about happiness and the care of the soul. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries philosophy and psychology became two separate and distinct disciplines.

Nathaniel Branden in The Psychology of Self-Esteem (1969) identified what he called the Muttnick principle: "Man desires and needs the experience of self-awareness that results from perceiving his self as an objective existent—and he is able to achieve this experience through interaction with the consciousness of other living entities."

Plato, in his dialogue "Alcibiades I" has Socrates ask: "And if the soul too, my dear Alcibiades, is to know herself, she must surely look at a soul, and especially at the region of it in which occurs the virtue of a soul—wisdom, and at any other part of a soul which resembles this?" He analogizes this process to that of looking in a mirror.

Socrates suggests that if a soul, a human consciousness, is to know itself, then it must be reflected in the mirror of another soul, his friend.

#### So far this is the lineup for Sunday, July 9, 2000:

Welcome  
Celebration of Freedom—?  
Celebration of Visitors  
Celebratory Announcements  
Celebration of Each Other  
Ellen's Corner—Ellen  
Celebration of Art—?  
Celebration of Heroes—?  
Celebration of Talent—?  
Oratory—**Martin Cowen**—"The Hero Behind the Mask"  
Celebration of Amateur Talent—?  
Celebration of Personal Mission—?  
Spiritual Exercise—?  
Closing Quotation

**Volunteers needed for next time!**

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## Celebration Schedule 2000

We have two more special Celebrations planned in 2000—one in September and one in November. These special Celebrations are intended to make our organization known to other specific groups who are likely to have values in common with us.

- Sunday, July 9—a regular Celebration (notice that this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday because of the TOC summer seminar). Martin will give the oratory entitled "The Hero Behind the Mask." We need all other performers.
- Sunday, August 6—a regular Celebration. **Tom** will give the oratory entitled "Life Lessons from Baseball." We need all other performers.
- Sunday, September 3—a special Celebration. No other performers needed.
- Sunday, October 1—a regular Celebration. We need all performers.
- Sunday, November 5—a special Celebration. No other performers needed.
- Sunday, December 3—a regular Celebration. We need all performers.

### Contact information:

Martin L. Cowen III is the director of the Fellowship of Reason®.

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