

Fellowship of Reason®

December 2000 Newsletter "Promoting Individual Excellence and Virtue"

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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.

Next time: The New World Myth

What do *The Lion King*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Lost Horizons*, *Frequency*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Gladiator*, *Star Trek* episode 26 "Errand of Mercy", the concepts of God, heaven, and meaning of life and man, all have in common?

Joseph Campbell thought that one day a new compelling mythology would be created. Professor Campbell did not foresee the story. He knew only that the people of the myth would be all of humanity.

I believe I have discovered the substance of **the new world myth**. An artist will have to render the myth as art, but I will tell you the elements of the story next time.

Good Luck

I have argued that **virtuous action** (rationality, productivity, pride, et al.), **selective focus** of attention (upon the good things in life such as freedom, heroes, art, music, ethics, personal mission), and **inner work** (becoming aware of the contents of one's consciousness and resolving sources of pain or fear or guilt) are necessary to happiness. I went so far as to write an essay entitled "When I Suffer, It's Always My Fault." What about luck? Cannot bad luck short-circuit the happiness of the perfectly moral man? Cannot illness, accidents, misfortune, evil doers, or death ruin even the most moral of men?

My optimism regarding the human condition is a common objection to the efficacy and "rationality" of our philosophy of reason. However, I do indeed

recognize that bad luck can destroy human happiness. How, then, can I justify having written an essay entitled "When I Suffer, It's Always My Fault"?

Here is my answer—virtuous action, selective focus, and inner work are **necessary, but not sufficient**, conditions of happiness. **Aristotle** agrees: "great and frequent reverses can crush and mar our bliss both by the pain they cause and by the hindrance they offer to many activities. Yet nevertheless even in adversity nobility shines through, when a man endures repeated and severe misfortune with patience, not owing to insensibility but from generosity and greatness of soul."

Fundamentally there are two types of bad luck—metaphysical bad luck and man-made bad luck. We are not considering here the natural consequences upon the actor of his own bad or foolish actions. Our concern is the prudent man who has bad things happen to him. As I indicated bad things fall into the two broad categories of the metaphysical and the man-made.

Among the metaphysical bad things are genetic and infectious diseases and natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and lightning.

Man-made bad things are caused by negligent or wicked men—drunken drivers, the unscrupulous, naked thieves, rapists, and murders.

The interesting thing about both of these categories of bad things is that a prudent man can do a great deal today in America to avoid them. Victims of hurricanes mostly choose to live in high-risk areas. People can come inside when a thunderstorm threatens. Yearly checkups and the advance of medical science have significantly reduced health as an area of great concern for prudent people. (I am thinking about facts such as in year 1750 according to Rousseau 50% of all children died by the age of eight years.) Defensive driving, seat belts, burglar alarms, and attention to one's environment greatly diminish one's chances of victimization by wicked or negligent men.

Mankind is advancing toward an earthly paradise. Compared with Aristotle's time, we have achieved an earthly paradise.

While bad luck can upset one's chances for happiness, with prudence one can avoid most "bad luck." In cases where, despite all prudence, bad luck is not avoided, the noble soul still shines through, as Aristotle says.

Please call me to share any reactions you may have to this essay.

Last Time—"What May FOR Ask Of You?"

During December 2000's oratory I argued that FOR may rationally ask three things of its members: attendance, participation, and personal moral progress.

Attendance is necessary in order that a moral community exist. There is no need to prove the importance of morality to this audience. That community is necessary requires proof. Community is necessary for three reasons: 1) psychological visibility and the opportunity to utilize one's faculties, 2) division of labor, specialization, and economies of scale, and 3) structure. Attendance is necessary to community by definition.

Participation is necessary because FOR is NOT an entertainment. In FOR there is no separation like that between actor and audience, teacher and student, employer and employee. In a moral community we are all entrepreneurs and customers of the organization.

Personal moral progress is necessary because that is the goal and reward of attending and participating in a moral community. Since we do not believe in duty, we must utilize **knowledge, self-responsibility, and independent action** to achieve our personal goals. Personal moral progress is achieved by virtuous action, selective focus, and inner work. Personal moral progress results in improved personal happiness.

Closing Quotation from Nietzsche: "For the man of knowledge there are no duties."

Celebration Schedule 2001

- Sunday, January 7, 2001. Oratory: "**The New World Myth.**"
- Sunday, February 4, 2001
- Sunday, March 4, 2001
- Sunday, April 1, 2001
- Sunday, May 6, 2001
- Sunday, June 3, 2001
- Sunday, July 1, 2001
- Sunday, August 5, 2001
- Sunday, September 2, 2001
- Sunday, October 7, 2001
- Sunday, November 4, 2001
- Sunday, December 2, 2001

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