

# Fellowship of Reason®

January 2001 Newsletter

"Promoting Individual Excellence and Virtue"

Volume 3, Number 1

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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.

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## Second Draft of Brochure Enclosed

Tom, Beth, Vera, Dan, Ellen, and Mark S. have commented upon the brochure. Many of their suggestions have been incorporated into this second draft. Further comments are requested.

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## Bad Luck

Bad luck resulting in sickness, injury, loss, or death can be grouped into four categories: (1) natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, lightning, tornadoes, earthquakes, and asteroids; (2) genetic and infectious diseases; (3) negligent or vicious others; and (4) accidents, such as slip and falls, and equipment failures.

Individuals, from time to time, must deal with bad luck. A moral community, interested in ethics and the question "how ought one live?," likewise must deal with bad luck. "How ought one live in the circumstance of bad luck?" is an ethical question.

**Philosophically speaking** (and to one suffering bad luck speaking philosophically is little comfort) bad luck is a manifestation of the conditionality of life. That life is conditional is a fundamental fact of human nature. The very existence of morality is a consequence of the fact that life is not guaranteed and requires a particular pattern of behavior. All human endeavors are the purposeful struggle of human beings to achieve and maintain health and happiness. Without the possibility of defeat and death, human action, morality, and happiness would not even exist.

People can mitigate the risk of suffering caused by bad luck by holding back from life itself. One can

choose not to have friends, lovers, spouses, or children, because the possibility of loss or injury is too painful. One can choose to forego the beloved career, because failure is too painful. One can choose to say "NO" to life, because in saying "YES" to life, you face the certainty of its inevitable passing.

When you find or create and embrace precious values, you take an enormous risk—the risk of losing that value. But, because of the conditionality of life, that risk is the price of all values. One can choose to live a tepid life, and thereby diminish the highs and lows. Or one can fully embrace life, say "YES" to life, and face the inevitable passing of all values in death.

"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."  
Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919)

So what happens when one suffers bad luck? The loss or threat of loss can be related to loved one, oneself, or one's property. People have a tendency to measure suffering in absolute terms. When a bad thing happens, it is the worst thing you are suffering at the moment. Comparing one's own worse thing to another's greater loss is often little comfort. For example, evaluating the total loss of property as less important than a diagnosis of a potentially life threatening illness, did not stop investors in the Great Crash of 1929 from jumping out of windows because their paper wealth disappeared over night.

When one suffers bad luck, there may be a permanent ending, a defeat, a death. (In this context I am obviously not referring to the death of the person who is the victim of bad luck. I am referring to the permanent loss of one of his precious values.) There is no reasoning through death. It can only be experienced. It can only be **suffered**. In the face of some kinds of bad luck, one must go through hell. Whether one will survive his journey into the Underworld cannot be known in advance. The only thing certain is that the journey must be made if a resurrection is to follow death.

Dante's guide through the *Inferno* was Virgil. One function of a full service moral community is to provide that guidance in the hopefully rare cases of bad luck.

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### **Last time—The New World Myth, Part I: People of the Myth**

During January's Celebration, I argued that we all live by various myths, both personal and universal. As an example, I mentioned that I lived the myth of my family history and became a lawyer. It took me over 20 years to realize my mistake. "Myth," though, does not necessarily imply false or foolish. "Myth," in this context, means a learned pattern of behavior.

A welfare mother lives by a certain myth. A man might live the myth of his vicious father. A woman might, with the consent of a parent, live the myth of childhood into her adult years.

Awareness that we live by various myths elevates our level of consciousness so that we can evaluate and change the myths we live by, if appropriate.

I changed my myth to the myth of the entrepreneur. By knowing the details of the myth of the entrepreneur (Hank Rearden is an example of a fictional entrepreneur) I can anticipate years of effort to create a useful product (FOR) and years of effort to sell that improved product to an uninterested world.

Myth is part of a broader concept—culture. Culture is language, literature, myth, customs, philosophy, science, religion, and institutions. Culture is like a vast protoplasmic ocean in which we all live. The cultural ocean is not uniform. There are relatively healthy parts of our cultural ocean. There are also sick and poisonous parts.

Like our personal and universal myths, we can be aware of, evaluate, and change our culture.

More on this next time.

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### **So far this is the lineup for February 2001:**

Welcome  
Celebration of Freedom—**Tom**  
Celebration of Visitors  
Celebration of Each Other  
Celebratory Announcements  
Celebration of Art—**Chris**  
Ellen's Corner—**Ellen**  
Celebration of Talent—**Linda**  
Oratory—**Martin**  
Reflection  
Closing Quotation

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### **Celebration Schedule 2001**

- 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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