

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.

Disaster Relief

If the Fellowship of Reason® wishes to supplant religious institutions as the preeminent moral institution in America, we must be able to manage grief. Two of our members called me after our national tragedy to inquire about how we Eudaimonists might deal with it. I wondered, how? So, I watched some of our nationally televised religious rituals. I got some ideas. In this essay I would like to express my dissatisfaction with some of what I saw during these rituals, to state what I regard as the real needs that must be addressed by a moral community, and to address those needs.

1. Weak or ineffectual relief efforts

Well-intentioned religious leaders have attempted to deal with our national tragedy. I thank them. They are attempting to guide us through a national horror. They took the stage when we needed spiritual action. It is perhaps unseemly to nit pick their work. Nevertheless, I am going to do so because the success of the Fellowship of Reason® and, more broadly, the mental health of mankind depend upon dealing rationally with such tragedies.

I was distressed by three religious relief efforts—**praying for the terrorists, suggesting that God had a high, incomprehensible purpose in allowing these terrorists acts, and blaming American culture.**

Praying for terrorists or forgiving them is not appropriate. In a rational world forgiveness is a function of restitution, repentance, retribution, and reformation. A murdered human being cannot be restored. A dead spouse, parent, child, sibling, or friend cannot be replaced. In the case of murder restitution is impossible. These terrorists, living and

dead, are and were completely unrepentant. Retribution is possible only upon living perpetrators. These terrorists cannot be and do not wish to be reformed.

I understand the psychological value of avoiding consumption by rage, but this concern is for the long-term. When you are confronted by the outrageous, outrage is appropriate. The emotion must be fully experienced and worked through.

Suggesting that God had a high, incomprehensible purpose in allowing these terrorist acts is not useful. Modern Christians conceive that their God is all powerful and all good. These assumptions result in the problem of evil called by scholars theodicy. Here is the problem: If great evil happens, then God cannot be all powerful and all good. Here's why:

Premise 1: The terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center was an unmitigated evil.

Premise 2: An all-powerful and all good God would not allow evil on the level of the WTC bombing.

There are two possible conclusions from these premises: (1) God is all-powerful and could have stopped the bombing. He did not stop the bombing. Therefore, He is not all good. (2) God is all good and he wanted to stop the bombings. He could not. Therefore, He is not all powerful.

Because premises 1 and 2 necessarily yield the conclusion that God is either not all powerful or not all good, theists proceed to question the premises (but not their assumptions about God).

Premise 1 (the bombings are perfectly evil) is challenged in two ways. God has a high and incomprehensible purpose in allowing the bombings. His purpose and means are good. The other challenge is that the victims, now in heaven, are better off.

The suggestion that God has an incomprehensible purpose is based upon our human experience that many happenings can be "understood." The bombings can be "understood," but only as unmitigated evil. There is no heavenly perspective

from which the killing of 5,000 plus innocent civilians can be viewed as "good." The truth is that there are evil people in the world. The characteristic psychology of evil people is their desire to destroy and kill. Evil people are different from non-evil people in that good people are motivated to create values and life.

My answer to the claim that the victims are now in heaven is, simply, that this is wishful thinking. Also, the fact that one survives and is happy after a tragic event does not undo the horrible experience. Being given a new wife and children does not make up for Job's (of the Bible) loss of his first wife and children to God's caprice after God's tortures are ended.

Premise 2 (God would not permit the bombings) is challenged in two ways. God gave us free will. In the absence of free will we are merely puppets on strings and not moral beings. Free will means that people are free to bomb the WTC. The other challenge is the previously mentioned high, incomprehensible purpose theory.

In answer to the free will explanation, I suggest that God is not, by the modern Christian definition, limited by reality or logic. He could have designed reality and logic in another, less horrible, way. Furthermore, no human parent in the name of free will or self-expression or scientific curiosity would allow his own child even to pull the wings off a fly, much less kill his human playmates.

Blaming American culture comes close to endorsing the terrorists' own explanations for the WTC bombings. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson are reported to have suggested that God has removed his protection of Americans and allowed this terrorist attack because we have pornography on the Internet, the Supreme Court does not allow prayer in government schools, and because of the general secularization of the American culture.

I, personally, am in favor of all three cultural developments, as I suppose many Americans are.

These American religious fanatics are merely the non-violent Christian fundamentalist counterparts of the murderous Islamic fundamentalist fanatics who have killed thousands, destroyed our property, and changed our way of life forever.

I'll have nothing further to say about Falwell and Robertson.

2. What real needs should be addressed and how?

I feel horror, disbelief, helplessness, vulnerability, fury, fear, shock, loss, anger, sadness, compassion, pity, moral indignation, rage, etc. I don't feel guilty.

Like many people I listened in horror as the attack happened on Tuesday 9-11. I saw Steve's post on the Reason group reporting the first strike. I assumed that a piper cub had impacted the World Trade Center by accident. I went to pick up my son at school and turned on talk radio only to learn that something much more dastardly was afoot. I drove away from the school wondering if anthrax might be released in Atlanta. I spent the next three days watching the television coverage.

In the days after the tragedy I tried to give blood. My aspirin-laced blood was not acceptable and the blood banks were filled before I even got in line. I made a financial contribution to the Red Cross. On Thursday I went to our philosophy tapes event and talked with friends about my feelings, about my rage. I drank too much wine.

What's to be done? What is a rational person—a person who does not pray—to do?

A rational nation must *act*, not pray. The action needs are justice, security, and therapy. All three are related. Serving one need will serve the others. Here is what I propose.

Action for America:

Destroy Terrorists upon Communicated Threat.

For years Americans and others have been the victims of terrorism. Because of our fear of slipping into a new Vietnam, we have allowed terrorists to threaten us from behind the borders of host countries. We have even allowed terrorists to come out from those countries to strike us and then scurry back home. We might lob a cruise missile or two, but we did not invade the host country to root out the terrorists. That was a mistake. Whenever a terrorist group threatens American, we must go after them and destroy them. No more "respect" for borders that shield terrorists, even if it means war.

We must, henceforth, engage in a sustained war against terrorism and against their host states.

Destroy Saddam Hussein. Also, with respect to rouge states like Iraq, we should not have allowed Saddam Hussein to remain in power. He is a terrorist dictator. He is developing weapons of mass destruction to kill Americans and to harm American interests. We should, immediately, invade Iraq and terminate his reign.

Mitigate the Damage. We must mitigate the loss to the families of those killed by this unspeakable tragedy. Financial and emotional sustenance must be given to those suffering these terrible losses.

Rebuild New York. We must rebuild the World Trade Center. Only this time, let us build two towers **two hundred stories tall.** Make it the largest building on earth. Make it the greatest monument to freedom, civilization, and mankind ever built and ever likely to be built. Build a building that will last 500 years and that will never be surpassed. Inscribe forever the names of the victims of this bombing upon its foundations.

Action for ourselves:

Prepare ourselves for battle. It is ironic that on the Thursday before this attack on America we were talking at philosophy tapes about the average American's sense that he is a John Wayne. Well, as we know, there were thousands of John Waynes in evidence on Tuesday 9-11. I am speaking of the passengers on United Airlines Flight 93 who decided to fight with the hijackers and crash the plane rather than allow the terrorists to reach their target. I am speaking of the firemen who, following the first jetliner strike, mounted the steps of the WTC to save lives, only to lose their own lives shortly thereafter. There are thousands of other heroes.

I hope that should I be faced with a terrorist's knife that I will have the courage to fight. In order to ensure such a result, we need to prepare ourselves for battle by remaining fit and by training. Able Americans should be armed.

Celebrate Freedom and Heroes. I am proud that the Fellowship of Reason® has been celebrating freedom for the last 2 years and 11 months. Freedom has been and will continue to be the first element in our monthly Celebration. I am proud that the Fellowship of Reason® has been celebrating heroes. Philosophically we knew we were on the right track. Now we know it in our gut!

Therapy. There is only one way to get through hell and that is to keep moving. The greatest danger is to be overcome by the pain and lie down. If we lie down, we stay in hell.

We must talk about our feelings. Many of us did on Thursday night. Others did on Wednesday.

In addition to experiencing our outrage and talking about it, we must also act. Do our small parts. Return to our businesses with unusual vigor. The American economy is simply the sum total of every family's economic activity. Act to help save lives, mitigate damage to the victims and their families, clean up the mess, and rebuild. Generally, help of this type will involve making financial contributions to the American Red Cross and similar organizations.

Conclusion

It's funny how remote our Internet arguments about the existence of "heroes" seem merely one week later. The subject of heroes is no longer of simple philosophical interest. We have seen and heard about thousands of heroes on and after 9-11. Many heroes, I fear, are yet to die. Our national debates about the Social Security trust fund and Democrats versus Republicans seem remote and unimportant.

We have experienced Death, death more personal that most of us have ever known. We are in a state of fury.

O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
That I am meek and gentle with these
butchers!
Thou art the ruins of the noblest man
That ever lived in the tide of times.
Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,—
Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby
lips,
To beg the voice and utterance of my
tongue,—
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
And dreadful objects so familiar
That mothers shall but smile when they
behold
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war;
All pity choked with custom of fell deeds;

And Caesar's spirit, raging for revenge,
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's
voice
Cry "Havoc," and let slip the dogs of war;
That this foul deed shall smell about the earth
With carrion men, groaning for burial.

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene I.

Marcus Antonius speaking over the slain
body of Julius Caesar.

October 2001 Celebration:

Welcome
Celebration of Freedom—**In honor of our fallen
heroes by ?**
Celebration of Visitors
Celebration of Each Other
Celebratory Announcements
Celebration of Personal Mission—**Randy**
Celebration of Heroes
Celebration of Literature—**Ellen**
Celebration of Art—**Peter**
Oratory—"Personal Moral Progress, Part II: Ladies
and Gentlemen" by **Martin Cowen**
Closing Quotation
Bring your Personal Mission Notebook to
Celebration.

FOR's Potluck supper

Saturday, September 22, 2001 at 7 p.m. Scott's or
Martin Cowen's house.

FOR's Café Conversation

Saturday, September 29, 2001, at 11 a.m.

FOR's Philosophy Tapes

Each Thursday Night: FOR is sponsoring a
philosophy survey course that is free. We meet every
Thursday night at 7:30 p.m. at Vera's house.

Celebration Schedule 2001

- Sunday, October 7, 2001—Personal Moral Progress,
Part II
- Sunday, November 4, 2001—Personal Moral
Progress, Part III
- Sunday, December 2, 2001—Felix the Cat is my God

Contact information:

To talk to somebody about FOR call Vera at 404- or
Martin at 770-471-9800.

To receive e-mail notice of FOR's activities send
you e-mail address to mlcowen@mindspring.com

To receive this newsletter in the mail send your U.S.
Mail address to mlcowen@mindspring.com

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