

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.

The Myth of FOR

[A history looking back from the 22nd century CE.]

It's hard to imagine from the perspective of 100 years and the widespread acceptance of *the philosophy of reason*¹ that the Fellowship of Reason® consisted once of only 36 charter members. Yet that is the case.

What was it that made FOR so successful?

The simplest answer is that Western Culture had been moving toward *the philosophy of reason* in fits and starts for over 2500 years. Any person with a classical education could grasp the fundamentals, but the final pieces were not visible until the middle of the 20th century. It took a little more than 50 years for *the philosophy of reason* to emerge as a whole and to flourish.

The key elements of *the philosophy of reason* (as everybody knows today and takes for granted!) are (1) the natural world exists; (2) the senses are valid; and (3) man has free will.

A fourth element discoverable only centuries after the scientific revolution and the industrial revolution is man is the fountainhead of his own meaning.

The first three elements are the necessary foundations for the scientific worldview: There is a world. I can sense it. I can choose (or not) to discover its nature.

The fourth element provides the motive for science—the life of man.

¹ *The philosophy of reason* is named Eudaimonism. Eudaimonism is the philosophy of individual flourishing.

(1) *The natural world exists.*

Human beings had to learn that there is a difference between *dreams and desires* on the one hand and *what is* on the other. Human beings get sick, grow old, and die. These three facts of human nature have motivated man's flights of fantasy for millennia. Human beings also had to learn the related lesson that man is conscious and that his consciousness contains memories, interpretations, and imaginations, all of which can be mistaken. These distinctions are taken for granted in the 22nd century.

(2) *The senses are valid.*

In the early 21st century sensory skeptics asked themselves, "Why do I *want* to doubt the evidence of my senses?" Their answer was that they harbored a terrible pain or fear or guilt that they did not *wish* to see. In order to repress the knowledge of the cause of that pain or fear or guilt, they found it most effective to deny the validity of their senses. Once the sensory skeptics identified their motive, they easily abandoned their skepticism in the face of the obvious hypocrisy and logical fallacy of relying upon their senses for daily living and denying them during philosophical chatter.

(3) *Man has free will.*

The early discoveries of science led to a mechanistic model of the universe. Many people jumped to the conclusion that science (man's invention) would someday discover a determining cause—outside of the individual actor—for the choices the individual makes.

Psychologists also discovered a powerful motive for denying that man has free will. If man's will is not free, then he is not morally culpable for wrongful (in his own opinion) acts. A determinist *avoids guilt* by denying his will is free. "I couldn't help myself!" he cries *sub silencio*.

Identifying this vicious motive was enough to cause the determinists to look beyond their personal interest in relief from guilt and to make further inquiry.

The following simple test was a clue. Imagine that science has identified all of the factors that determine a particular choice. Might the determinist, advised of science's prediction of his next action, choose another course? Intuitively, the determinist knows his answer is yes.

Free will is simply a method of describing the distinctive way—different from rocks, amoebas, plants, and animals—that human beings act. Human beings observe the natural world *and their own mental contents*. They learn from others many things they have not personally observed. They apply that knowledge to the goal of living successfully. Man is not, however, required by his nature to seek life. He can seek death by committing suicide or by other means inimical to others. Man's awareness of his capacity to choose life or death and the many means to attain either goal is the meaning of "free will."

(4) *Man is the fountainhead of his own meaning.*

This piece of the puzzle did not become visible until the second half of the 20th century. As a result of advances in *ethics and politics* and *science and technology*, man has been progressively relieved of sickness, old age, and death, and of the necessity to work. Many people have acquired *otium* or leisure in the last 500 years. Leisure is a wonderful opportunity, but it is also an enormous responsibility (one that some people would like to be rid of). One must be educated to leisure and most people in the 20th century were not so educated. Friedrich Nietzsche anticipated the problem of meaninglessness as a consequence of a loss of faith in traditional religions. Existentialism described the angst of people with too much time on their hands. Television, drug abuse, alcoholism, and sexual promiscuity provided some relief from the boredom.

Religion and the demands of survival had until the 20th century defined what man would do with his days, *viz*: seek God in Heaven and struggle for survival, relatively unsuccessfully, on earth. Third World inhabitants of the 20th century never asked, "What is the meaning of life?!" With sickness reduced, old age and death delayed, and time and money to do . . . anything, many people in the West were clueless as to what to do next. It is a timeless cliché that a wealthy man's children are worthless. The children of the rich have rarely known what to do with their lives of leisure.

In the late 20th century and early 21st this crucial new responsibility was emphasized by the Fellowship of Reason®. The discovery of one's individual personal mission in life is urgent. One's personal mission in life *is* his meaning!

When these four elements became widely accepted, individuals gained an enormous confidence. We have come to realize that the meaning of life is in living life as fully as our individual capacities allow. We have confidence that our moral status is within our personal control. We are "in" life *and* "above" it—above it in the sense that we know how it progresses, the meaning of it all, and how it ends. We no longer fear life. We love it without reservation.

What you should know:

- The denial of the natural world, of the validity of the senses, and of free will is motivated by pain or fear or guilt of the facts of the natural world (primarily sickness, old age, and death).
- Survival and escapist fantasies no longer occupy most of the lifetime of modern man. Man has leisure. Man must be educated to find meaning in his own life by defining a life mission or missions.

May 2002 Celebration:

Welcome—
Celebration of Freedom—Martin
Celebration of Visitors—
Celebration of Each Other—
Celebratory Announcements—
Celebration of Personal Mission—Randy
Celebration of Heroes—Chris
Celebration of Literature—Ellen
Celebration of Talent—David
Oratory—"Grace in Our Time" by David
Closing Quotation—

FOR's Potluck

FOR's potluck is scheduled for Saturday, May 18, 2002 at 7 p.m. at Linda and Martin's house.

FOR's Café Conversation

FOR's café conversation is scheduled for Saturday, May 25, 2002, at 11 a.m.

Celebration Schedule 2002

- Sunday, January 6, 2002
- Sunday, February 3, 2002
- Sunday, March 3, 2002
- Sunday, April 7, 2002
- Sunday, May 5, 2002
- **Sunday, June 2, 2002**
- Sunday, July 7, 2002
- Sunday, August 4, 2002
- Sunday, September 1, 2002
- Sunday, October 6, 2002
- Sunday, November 3, 2002
- Sunday, December 1, 2002

2002 Membership Information:

36 charter members as of 4-8-02 and 1 newsletter-only subscriber and 1 substantial donor

- Regular membership: \$35 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2002
 - Contributing membership: \$70 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2002
 - Lifetime membership: \$700 if paid prior to October 31, 2002
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Contact information:

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

To receive this newsletter free for 3 months in the U.S. mail send your U.S. Mail address to mlcowen@mindspring.com

To participate in unmoderated e-mail chat, please subscribe to our Yahoo! Group by sending an e-mail to reason-subscribe@yahogroups.com

A subscription for 12 monthly issues of this newsletter is \$15 per year.

Bylaws and other corporate documents may be viewed online at www.kindreason.com

Fellowship of Reason, Inc. is a Georgia nonprofit corporation.