

Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

December 2002 Newsletter "Advocating Heroic Engagement With Life"

Volume 4, Number 12

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. We study ethics.

Scott Erwin Orbach July 4, 1957-December 9, 2002

A dear friend of the Fellowship of Reason® passed away this month. He had completed his life's work, The Spirit of Andrew McCarthy, a novel. A memorial service was conducted on Sunday, December 15, 2002.

All Charter members 2003 dues are due

Please use the enclosed SASE to pay your 2003 dues. Please consider renewing at the Contributing Member level of \$70. Thank you.

Regular members' dues are paid through one year following their date of election to membership shown on your mailing label. Lifetime members are exempt from annual dues.

What did you get last year for your dues?

- Twelve live Celebrations with magnificent performances by fellow FOR members
- Twelve newsletters
- Reason online discussion group with hundreds of messages per month
- The web site: www.fellowshipofreason.com
- Membership directory
- Membership name tag
- Membership packet
- Overnight rafting trip (extra fees)
- The Bozart Festival
- Eleven pot lucks
- Twelve (?) movie nights
- Twelve (?) FOR pubs
- Several movie/theater nights out (extra fees)

- Birthday recognition (sporadic, but we'll get better)
- 26 weeks of philosophy discussion on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays
- Announcements for 26 of Steve Stokes' philosophy cafes and almost 20 weeks of the Invisible College (extra fees).

You received all these benefits for only \$35 in the case of regular members. Won't you consider renewing this year at the contributing level of \$70. Won't you ask your spouse or life partner to join us as a dues paying member?

In any event, please renew. We want you with us!

Where is Value?

Cultivate a sense of reverence toward yourself.

"Value" lives in you. What I mean by that is that there are no gods or committees that authoritatively determine value for you, *at least there shouldn't be!* All value is located within you. There are no disembodied values. Values are values *to* someone and *for* some purpose. The concept value describes a *relationship* between a living being and someone else or something else. Most abstractly a being's highest value is its flourishing. Flourishing means living fully in accordance with the being's nature. So a flower struggling to grow in the crack of a busy sidewalk is not flourishing, but a flower richly blooming in an enthusiast's garden is.

Your sacred values

My children are valuable to me for flourishing, for example. I could be more specific, but I don't have the space. My wife is a supreme value. I have other high values including my friends and the Fellowship of Reason®.

These people—my wife, my children, and my friends—are so valuable to me for my flourishing that I assign to them the adjective sacred, meaning that these values are the highest values in my

hierarchy of values and fundamental to my flourishing¹.

Many people have *not* named their sacred values, or any values for that matter. A problem with failing to identify one's sacred values is that one might inadvertently sacrifice a sacred value for a profane value. For example, were I to severely punish my child for messing up my desk, I would be sacrificing a sacred value for one profane. [Need I say that if my purpose in disciplining my child were to teach him an important life lesson, my action would be motivated by my sacred duty to educate my child. I would not be sacrificing my child for an orderly desk. I would be building my child's character. Keeping stuff like this straight is very important and is the essence of living consciously.]

In order to flourish one must acquire sacred values, that is, values that are very, very important to one. One's personal mission in life should be a sacred value. One should acquire friends that are worthy of being valued supremely. One way to do that is to avoid using *proximity* [one's neighbor or one's business associates] as the *sole* criterion for friendship. Obviously, we members of the Fellowship of Reason® follow this rule. We have members as far away as Colorado, New York, Alabama, and Florida. Some of our members in the Atlanta area drive 60 miles to be with their FOR friends.

Some people object to the adjective "sacred" because of the use of the word by religions. This attitude must be changed if one is to flourish, that is to be healthy and happy. A faith-based morality is not the only environment in which hierarchies of values can be formed. Religious people are not the only people who can value deeply, profoundly, fundamentally.

A reason that modern people often fail to create or embrace sacred values is that they have lost the sense that life is limited. We don't have the sense that life is limited because we hide sickness, old age, and death from ourselves in hospitals, nursing homes, and funeral homes. Not more than a century

¹ Only fundamental values can be sacred. If my hierarchy of values did not include wife, children, friends, and family (say I was a hermit), and my highest value was an orderly desk, orderly desk would be my highest value, but not sacred.

ago, most people had intimate and regular experience with death.

I don't advocate looking at death unnecessarily, but I do advocate having a rational appraisal of one's reasonable life span *and getting on with it!*

Disordered hierarchies of values

Some people put off living their own lives because they implicitly value the opinions of other people as those opinions might relate to one's appearance, or accumulated stuff, or job. If one has a prestigious job that one hates, a great many people, including me, have elected to waste the sacred time of their lives torturing themselves in a job they despise in order to *look good* to others (who couldn't actually care less!).

If you are putting off living your life as you would like (a sacred value) in order to look good to others (a profane value), rethink your strategy for living. Time is running out.

Some people put off living their own lives because of unrealistic criteria for friendship. I'm thinking of the kind of person who is looking for a blonde girl to date and will accept no substitutes. This sounds trivial and it is, but I know people who use this *kind* of criteria (not actually blondes, that's my own *sina qua non* for a good date ☺).

If one took the trouble to write down one's values and one had the temerity to actually write "blonde" down, he would see immediately how ridiculous the criterion is.

Are values subjective?

Vera posed a problem to the philosophy discussion group the other day. What if an emergency situation presented itself in which one could either save one's beloved pet from dying or save a human stranger? Vera wanted it to be true that everyone *should* save the human stranger. It *is* true, but how can that be so when I claim that value is *in* you. Doesn't my formulation make all value judgments subjective? We know that some people *would* save their dog!

Values *are* in you. Values describe relationships among you and other people or things. But *you* are not arbitrary! You have a nature, a human nature. That nature is fixed and can be known. The people and things that advance your flourishing are not

arbitrarily chosen. True values are objective. It is your job to *correctly* identify your values and to order them in the *correct* hierarchy. If you fail, your flourishing—your health and happiness—will be diminished. You may die!

In the case posed by Vera, a fully functioning human being² will identify the fact that another human being, otherwise unknown, is exactly like himself. The fully functioning human being will know that the stranger has reverence for himself. The fully functioning human being will recognize in the stranger another center of sacred values—the only such centers in existence—and act to preserve it.

To get a sense of the emotional truth of my claim, imagine that you saved your dog, rather than the human stranger. Imagine going to the human stranger's funeral and telling the people in attendance—the wife, the five children, the parents and siblings, the friends and co-workers—that yes you could have saved their beloved's life, but you wanted to save your dog instead. Not! So, obviously, you'd keep your act a secret from the relations of the deceased. Imagine telling your story to a girl on your first date as a part of the getting-to-know-you chatter. Not!

While someone might save the dog rather than the human stranger, the dog saver would have to severely limit the scope of his psychological visibility henceforth. Who is going to want to relate to a dog saver/human sacrificer when he knows the dog saver/human sacrificer's hierarchy of values!?

Stop waiting and get on with it.

Life is very short. It is important that you stop waiting for tomorrow to begin living.

Choose your values and commit to them. One should not live life jumping from here to there, from place to place, from this girl (or boy) to that girl (or boy), from this wife to that, from this child to that, from this job to that. Values (which are man-made things) require years, often a lifetime of commitment. One cannot experience the sense of the sacred in a one-night stand. One cannot make a sacred life in Atlanta while planning to move to Key West "some day." Commit. Commit to Atlanta or Key West. But, for

² Some people are damaged. Some people are monsters. Such people are not fully functioning human beings and cannot experience empathy.

your sake, commit to some place, move there, and get on with your life.

Choice of dwelling place is first because in that place you will find your other sacred values: friends, life partner, moral community, career, and, maybe, children.

Sacred values are finally chosen for a lifetime. Sacred values are not provisional, chosen for the meantime until something better comes along.

1. Where you will live.
2. Who your friends will be
3. Who your life partner will be
4. What career you will pursue
5. Whether you will have children
6. Whether you will join a moral community

All of these values must be chosen finally and forever. Make your choice, carefully, and take the responsibility of your choice. Life has meaning only in the pursuit of your *sacred* values.

December Birthdays

Alexander—December 26

Leanna—December 27

Andrew—December 29

Mike—December 30

Celebration, January 5, 2003

Welcome—

Celebration of Freedom—HELP NEEDED HERE

Celebration of Visitors—

Celebration of Each Other—

Celebratory Announcements—

Celebration of Personal Mission—**Ellen**

Celebration of Performance Art (skit)—

Celebration of Heroes—**Tom**

Celebration of Literature—**Andrew**

Celebration of Art—**Chris**

Celebration of Talent—HELP NEEDED HERE

Oratory—**Martin**

Announcements—

Closing Quotation—

Philosophy Tapes

Philosophy tapes are played to a small private audience in the living room of a volunteer on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. The next playing is at Sally's house on Tuesday, January 7, 2003, at 7:30 p.m. Free.

Invisible College

Dr. Glenn Magee is lecturing every Thursday night at 7:30 p.m. at Vera's Intellectual Salon. Price: \$60 per month. Beginning Thursday, January 9, 2003, we will be studying Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Call Vera at 404-577-7968 for more information.

New FOR Internet Broadcast

www.fellowshipofreason.com

"The Entrepreneurial Spirit"

Philosophy Café

Attend Steve Stoke's Philosophy Café at Border's in Buckhead on the second Wednesday of every month at 8 p.m. and at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore in Duluth on the third Wednesday of every month at 8 p.m.

FOR's Film Night

Members and friends of FOR, Inc. enjoy a monthly movie night at John's studio using his extraordinary equipment. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, December 28, 2002. Arrive at 6:30 p.m. Doors will be locked for safety! Movie starts at 7:15 p.m. Free.

FOR's Pub Night

Members and friends of FOR, Inc. meet on the 4th Wednesday of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation.

FOR's next pub night is Wednesday, January 22, 2003, at 8 p.m.

FOR's January Potluck dinner

Our next monthly potluck is Saturday, January 18, 2003, at 7 p.m. at Vera's house. Please remember to bring something good to eat or drink.

Celebration Schedule

- **Sunday, January 5, 2003**
- Sunday, February 2, 2003
- Sunday, March 2, 2003
- Sunday, April 6, 2003
- Sunday, May 4, 2003
- Sunday, June 1, 2003
- Sunday, July 6, 2003
- Sunday, August 3, 2003
- Sunday, September 7, 2003
- Sunday, October 5, 2003
- Sunday, November 2, 2003
- Sunday, December 7, 2003
- Sunday, January 4, 2004

Membership Information:

FOR, Inc. has 39 members.

- Regular membership: \$35 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2003
- Contributing membership: \$70 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2003
- Lifetime membership: \$700 if paid prior to October 31, 2003

Contact information:

Visit us on the web at www.fellowshipofreason.com

To talk to somebody about FOR call Vera at 404-577-7968 or Martin at 770-471-9800 or Dan at 770-831-3010.

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@yahoogroups.com

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

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

How can you help support the Fellowship of Reason, Inc., the world's first and only reason-based moral community?

If you would like to support our activities, including our building fund, please consider these opportunities:

1. Attend our activities
2. Bring donuts
3. Subscribe to our monthly newsletter
4. Perform at Celebration
5. Recruit a person of like-mind and values
6. Volunteer your home for a potluck or other activity
7. Become a regular member
8. Become a contributing member
9. Become a lifetime member
10. Donate cash, property, time, or expertise
11. Locate and help us apply for a public or private grant
12. Make a testamentary gift

Make checks payable to Fellowship of Reason, Inc. and mail them to 8188 Pembroke Terrace, Jonesboro, GA 30236-4179. Use PayPal on the web at www.fellowshipofreason.com

To make a Last Will and Testament with a gift to FOR, Inc. contact your attorney. If you live in Georgia, Martin L. Cowen III, Attorney at Law, without charge, will prepare and supervise the execution (inside the perimeter or within 10 miles outside of I-285) of a simple will with a minimum unrestricted testamentary gift to FOR, Inc. of \$1,000. Call 770-471-9800 for more information. This offer may be withdrawn at any time without notice. Mr. Cowen, a licensed Georgia attorney, and not FOR, Inc., is solely responsible for any legal services rendered by him with or without charge.
