



# NUGGET

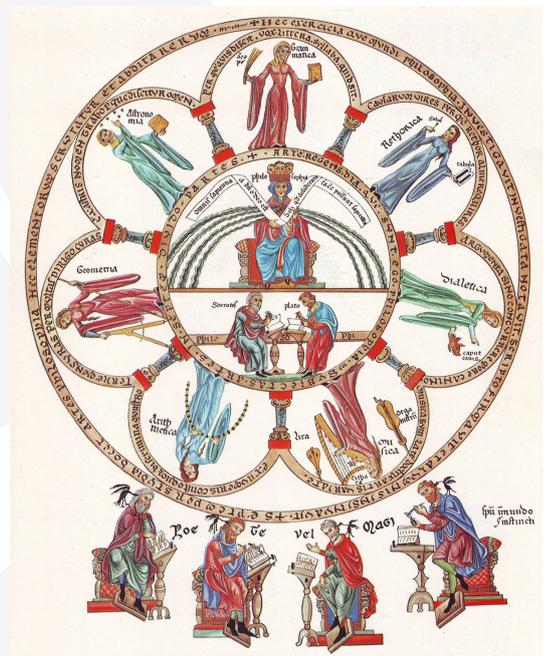
## The Liberal arts and sciences

**Summary:** The meaning of *The Liberal arts and sciences*.

Language is a fluid. It might be compared to a river which flows from one point in time, and on through the centuries. From its source, it takes its chemical composition. If you follow its course, you will find it merges with other streams, absorbing elements from other tributaries. It is affected by the landscape, or culture, through which it passes. Just as language consists of words and constructs that, like a river change over time.

Our Ceremonies took their present form in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, since then a lot has happened, and as a result, words and phrases used in our ritual have meanings that are no longer properly understood; but understanding them can lead to a better grasp of the meaning of our Ceremonies.

Let us start with the word *liberal*. Nowadays it has political connotations, or can be associated with generosity. Though even that meaning is now passing into history, further demonstrating the changing meaning of language over time. The word derives from *liber*, the Latin word for free. The liberal arts were considered essential for an involvement in the civic life in Ancient Greece, which was only open to free-men, not slaves. Let us take the first three: grammar, rhetoric, and logic, which were once known collectively as the Trivium. A command of these subjects enabled a citizen to participate in public debate, as well as in activities such as defending himself in court, or serving on a jury. In early mediaeval times the list of subjects was extended to include arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, which included the study of astrology. These subjects were grouped together as the Quadrivium, and when added to those of the Trivium formed the seven liberal arts.



*The 7 Liberal Arts, Herrad of Landsberg [Public domain]*

The word *art* is now used in a more restrictive sense, to refer to painting, sculpture, music and dance. Although there are echoes of its broader meaning in our Universities where students study for a *Bachelor of Arts* degree in subjects such as language, history or the social-sciences.

The word *science* has also taken on a new meaning over time. It derives from the Latin word *scientia* which means knowledge. At the time when Freemasonry was establishing itself, it still held that meaning and implied learning. It was an era of discovery, when, for example, Sir Isaac Newton was changing our understanding of the world and converting observation and study into 'natural laws'. This was seen as an extension of our understanding of the world, rather than a new branch of knowledge. What we would now call science was then known as 'natural philosophy'.

As you can see, this short phrase, 'the liberal arts and sciences' has a subtly different meaning from that which you might expect, and understanding it does begin to help in our understanding of the Second Degree. A command of these subjects enables an understanding of the universe created by The Grand Geometrician and the ability to discuss and debate it, and communicate it to others.



### **Recommended use of Nuggets**

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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