



Be Nice to Yourself: On "Getting Small"

By
Martin L. Cowen III

The investment advisor called to say that the retirement account is losing value. There are lines at gas stations and the pumps at others are closed because they have no gas. The Government is planning to spend one trillion dollars to bail out bad investments on Wall Street after bailing out Fannie and Freddie, AIG, and others. Those of us on Main Street who have a house and mortgage will not be bailed out. Anyone with an 80% mortgage is probably "inverted" due to deflating house values, that is, the mortgage has a higher balance than the present value of the house which secures the mortgage.

Only a Pollyanna or Dr. Pangloss would say: "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."

When the Fellowship of Reason began on November 1, 1998, ten years ago, the world was experiencing euphoria approaching the coming millennium. The euphoria translated from the global level to the personal level. As the Fellowship of Reason approaches our ten-year anniversary, the world is experiencing depression. We are concerned about war on multiple fronts. We are concerned about the global economy. We are concerned about our own finances. Some of us are without jobs. Some of us are worried about our health. These grand problems are in addition to everyone's usual concern about routine work problems, routine financial problems, and routine family problems.

The point of this essay is to call these facts to attention and observe that we can be a function of these problems or we can be the variable. Forgive my mathematical metaphor, but I am tutoring Algebra II currently and I am thinking about math. What I mean is that a person can be a cause (a mathematical variable) or she can be an effect (a function of the variable). So, I can be a cause of my environment or I can be the effect of my environment. It is

preferable to be a cause rather than an effect, a variable than a function, active rather than passive.

We have all experienced a person who is out of sorts. It is common for us to simply ignore or avoid him and say: "He must be having a bad day." What we are saying is that the person's sorry behavior is a "function" of a variable—his "bad day." We hope that tomorrow he will not be having a bad day and, therefore, he will not behave badly. He is a function of the type of day he is having. He will behave well on a "good day."

In my own life, I am constantly on the lookout for internal causes to my dissatisfaction with others. The internal cause might be a chemical imbalance, such as a hangover or my failure to take my medication. During a chemical imbalance, I might yell, inappropriately, at my spouse or children. I might send a thoughtless e-mail. The internal cause might be a problem at work about which I am obsessing. The internal cause might be my lack of work. The internal cause might be my misbehaving child. Action directed *toward* the work problem, the lack of work, or the misbehaving child is appropriate. But yelling *at my wife* is not an appropriate expression of my work problem, my lack of work, or my misbehaving child. It takes a thoughtful and reflective person to realize that he must fight the temptation to strike out at his wife (or whomever) inappropriately.

In response to the global financial problems, a common response is to "get small." In my own case, this means that rather than going to our favorite Mexican restaurant twice a week, we go not at all. (I greatly regret that this may mean that our favorite Mexican restaurant may go out of business exacerbating the systemic problem.) It means that I fill up my gas tank sometimes twice a day whenever I see a gas station with no lines and open pumps. (I realize this behavior contributes to the systemic problem.) I cannot afford to run out of gas

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since I have to drive daily to two private schools for the kids, to work, and to various FOR activities. It means that I am constantly thinking of ways to avoid driving, though I have not reduced my trips to Fellowship of Reason activities.

I believe in “getting small.” But in doing so, I will be kind to myself. These times are stressful. We need not carry the stress with us though, if we are aware of it. So, in my case, when I abandon my favorite Mexican restaurant, I will not manufacture a justification to discharge my stress. I need not say, falsely, that the service or the food is now of poor quality and therefore, I will not longer go. I can be honest with myself and simply say that I cannot afford the cost of the restaurant or the gas to get there. I hope, after awhile, that I will be able to return.

“Getting small” in tough financial times means becoming more financially conservative. This is a good thing in the circumstances. “Getting small” ought not to mean getting socially small.

Friends and family are very important. In tough times family and friends are vital. If we are not to be functions of the times, but variables, we must resist the temptation to “get small” in our friendships. A perfectly natural tendency in depression (mental or economic) is to stay at home and hide in a closet. Staying at home and hiding in a closet, though, is not the rational thing to do. A “function” stays at home in the closet. A “variable” remains involved with his or her family and friends.

Now the involvement with family and friends might have to change forms. For instance, it has been a long, long time since I have picked up the check for the party at dinner. It may never happen again. I may have to cut down on my trips to visit Dan in Buford, because it is a 120 mile round trip for me and costs about \$34 in gas and two hours of travel time. But that does not mean I cannot call him more frequently and check on his well-being and that of his family. That does not mean I cannot meet him at one of many Fellowship of Reason activities during the month.

In order to increase family and friend time at a minimal cost, a “variable” might have friends over for dinner more frequently. Friends and family will drive some distance for a free meal and great company. A “variable” might make an effort to attend those FOR activities, like Philosophy Club or Movie Night or Fiction Book Club or Steve Whiteman’s Classical Film Appreciation Course, that are free and offer a free potluck supper with a small personal contribution to the spread. FORum is free and

offers free coffee and doughnuts. Invisible College is not free, but the cost is minimal. There is a free potluck with your own small personal contribution. The cost per lecture is less than the cost of gas to drive there. If none of these options appeal, try calling your friends. Go walking with your friends in the park. Or join Frank, Sally, and me for FOR Runners every Sunday morning 8 a.m. at Piedmont Park. If gas is an issue, call your FOR friend and carpool.

We need not withdraw into our shells and become hermits while getting financially small to survive these rough times.

While the high life is fun, the real life is spending time with family and friends. So, let us be nice to ourselves and avoid the natural tendency of “functions” to stay and home and hide in the closet during tough global and personal times. Be a “variable.” Remain active in your moral community.

About the name “The Eudaimonist”

A eudaimonist (pronounced “yoo-DIE-mon-ist”) is one who believes that the highest ethical goal is individual happiness and personal well-being. The term is derived from the ancient Greek word eudaimonia, which means, roughly, “well-being.”

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the columns appearing in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the organization. The Fellowship of Reason, Inc speaks only through its Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws, and the actions taken by the Board of Trustees as a board and recorded in the minutes of the corporation.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc.**Mission Statement**

The Fellowship of Reason® is dedicated to the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc. is a Georgia nonprofit corporation and a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation

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Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

Martin at 678-641-9321
Dan at 770-595-6106

Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group

**ATLAS SHRUGGED
BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP**
1st and 3rd Mondays 7 p.m. Norcross

Why after 50 years is "Atlas Shrugged" still affecting people's lives so dramatically?

I think it is because Ayn Rand challenges our filters, our automatic prejudices about our perceived reality; she calls this our "sense of life."

Through a clearer understanding of this

principle, we can see how we each sanction our own flourishing or our own destruction because of our learned and accepted foundational moral codes. This fuels our automatic responses, which produces our ultimate ends.

Come participate in this discussion only if you wish to be challenged and be, possibly, completely out of your comfort zone. I believe that learning requires a bit of discomfort!

Dan Barber

Sandy Springs Pub Night

SANDY SPRINGS PUB NIGHT
Second Wednesday of the month
Five Seasons Brewing, Sandy Springs

FOR is happy to announce a new Pub Night! Conveniently located in the Prado in Sandy Springs, the 5 Seasons Restaurant and Brewery is a microbrewery with award winning food, full bar, great ambiance, pool tables, darts, and an outside patio. Come join us the 2nd Wednesday of every month for intellectually stimulating fun!

Marianna

Apply Now For 2009 Classic Film Appreciation Course

Steve Whiteman's course in the appreciation of classic film will return in 2009 for its third year, at his newly upgraded wide-screen, surround-sound home theater in southeast Atlanta. Applications are now being accepted for twice-a-month, once-a-month, and space-available attendees. While there is no charge for the course, attendees will have certain responsibilities. Enrollment is limited.

The movies will be recognized classics, the majority from Hollywood's Golden Age—the 1930s and 40s—and the rest from other eras or other countries, with broad exposure to key directors, actors, and genres.

Programs will include a cartoon and/or short

subject; coming attractions; the feature film; and clips and commentary on personnel, techniques, and relevant popular culture, with discussion interspersed. Books and films will be prizes in the regular trivia contests.

The course will meet twice a month, on the evening of the first and second Saturdays. To join the group, for more information, or to be on the mailing list, email Steve at classic.film@yahoo.com.

"If you're looking for an antidote to movie mindlessness, look no further than Steve Whiteman's movie course. It is enjoyable, educational, thought provoking, and just plain fun." — A 2007-2008 Participant

Notice of Annual Meeting of the Membership

Please take notice that the annual meeting of the membership will occur on Sunday, November 2, 2008, at 2 p.m. immediately following the November FORum at Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Highway, Atlanta, Georgia.

Please take notice that nominations for the Board of Trustees of the Fellowship of Reason, Inc. will be received on Sunday, October 5, 2008, at 2 p.m. immediately following the October FORum.

The Bylaws of FOR may be read in full at:

<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/documents/bylaws.pdf>

The following are some relevant provisions of the Bylaws:

III. Members

G. Meetings of the membership

1. Annual meeting

The members of the corporation shall meet annually on the first Sunday in November following the regular monthly Forum to elect a Board of Trustees. Members as of September 1 (the record date within the meaning of Ga. Code Sec. 14-3-707) preceding the annual meeting shall be entitled to notice of this meeting in writing at least 30 days prior to the meeting. Notice contained in the monthly newsletter mailed in September shall be deemed sufficient notice of the meeting. The Secretary shall prepare an alphabetical list of the names and addresses of the members as of September 1. The list shall be made available for the inspection of any member two business days after the notice of the meeting. Forty percent of the Georgia membership shall constitute a quorum. (Non-Georgia members may vote, but their presence or absence shall not be considered for purpose of determining a quorum.) In the absence of a quorum, the existing trustees shall continue to serve as trustees.

2. Method of Election of Board of Trustees

Nominations for positions on the Board of Trustees shall be held on the first Sunday in October following the regular monthly Forum. The person making the nomination and the nominee must be present (in lieu of the nominee's presence a written statement that the nominee accepts the nomination shall

suffice). A quorum need not be present. Any member may be nominated for a position on the Board of Trustees. A member may offer himself for election. All nominations must be seconded. At the annual meeting, a volunteer member or members (not a Trustee) shall be appointed to count the ballots. Each member shall by secret ballot vote for a number of *different* names from among the nominees equal to the number of open trusteeships. The top vote receivers shall be elected as trustees whether or not the nominee receives a majority of votes. In the event of a tie at the bottom, any trusteeships that can be determined will be determined and the nominees tied shall be voted on again immediately by the members present. If the run-off vote between tied candidates does not resolve the tie, the election will be decided by coin-toss.

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5. Proxy voting

Members may vote in person or by proxy at a meeting of the membership. A proxy shall be a writing signed by the member indicating his vote on the matter or matters before the membership. A written proxy shall be counted toward a quorum. The written proxy of a non-Georgia member shall count toward a quorum. Whether the proxy is authentic shall be determined in this sole discretion of a majority of the Board of Trustees present at the meeting of the membership

**FOR's mission is to
promote the
personal
flourishing of our
members through
reason.**

Events

For detailed info on all upcoming events, visit
<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/calendar.htm>

FORum: A Celebration of Human Achievement

First Sunday noon
 FOR's premier event. Starting at noon with an InFORmation Hour conducted by Dan Barber for visitors and new members. Meet and greet at 12:30 p.m. The program starts at 1 p.m. and lasts one hour. We enjoy post-program conversation until 3 p.m. when those interested adjourn to a restaurant for further fellowship. Children's Program from noon to 3 p.m.

Martin Cowen director: 678-641-9321.

FOR Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, at the southwest corner of Piedmont Park on 10th Street. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit (corner of Piedmont and 10th Street) follows at 9 a.m. Breakfast lovers, walkers, and joggers welcome!

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321.

Philosophy Club: 1st/ 3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

Philosophy tapes are played to a small group of friends in a private home on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at Tele's house across the street from Sally's house. For book selections and more information, go to:

www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm

Tele Holt coordinator: 404-843-1886

telehold@gmail.com

Potluck: 3rd Saturday 7:30 p.m.

Our next Potluck is TBA. Remember it is potluck, so bring something good to eat and drink to share. Host: TBA.

Pub Nigh ts: 2nd Wednesday and 4th Thursday

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Wednesday at Five Seasons Brewing at 7 p.m. and on the 4th Thursday at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and conversation.

Scott Carper coordinator Manuel's:
 404-964-6697

Marianna coordinator Five Seasons Brewing:
mashoonya@yahoo.com

Movie Night: 4th Saturday, 6:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at John Grover's photography studio to enjoy potluck and a movie. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, October 26, 2008, at 6:30 p.m.

John Grover coordinator: 404-872-4555

Atlas Shrugged Book Discussion Group:

1st and 3rd Mondays in Norcross
 Everyone is invited to discuss this epoch shaping book.

Dan Barber discussion leader: 770-595-6106

*Join us for our
 next monthly
 FORum:*

**October 5,
 2008
 Sunday at 1 p.m.**
 (Meet, Greet at 12:30)

Come early for the
**InFORmation
 Hour**

At noon
 Moderated by Dan Barber for
 visitors and new members

FOR Children's Program
 from noon to 3 p.m.
 Educational Program from
 12:30 p.m. to 12:50 p.m.

Birthdays

- October 17 Roxanne K.
- October 20 Larry W.
- October 21 David Z.
- October 26 Ron M.
- October 31 Martin Cowen

- November 2 Mary A.
- November 3 John G.
- November 12 Randy S.

Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: _____

Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!



Fellowship of Reason

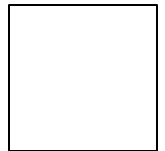
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A Reason-Based Moral
Community for the 21st
Century

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We're on the Web!
See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com