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The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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Super Powers

By Martin L. Cowen III

This essay will:

- (1) Define what your Super Powers are;
- (2) Explain the relationship between Super Powers and the goal of life, meaning of life, and purpose of life;
- (3) Describe how people might find their Super Powers; and,
- (4) State how and why the Fellowship of Reason provides opportunities for you to exercise your Super Powers;

Look! Up in the sky!

It's a bird!

It's a plane!

It's Superman!

Yes, it's Superman! Strange visitor from another planet who came to earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. Superman, who can change the course of mighty rivers, bend steel with his bare hands, and who, disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way.

(Opening sequence from the television show "Adventures of Superman," 1952-1958)

Examples

Before giving a definition of Super Powers let us consider some examples.

Every member of the Fellowship of Reason has Super Powers.

- One of our members presides over an invitation-only film club twice a month from his home. This special member

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Super Powers

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loves classic films, is a great teacher, and is—thanks to years of hard work and careful planning—retired and able to devote hours and hours to the exercise of his Super Power.

- One of our members hosts two book clubs and a taped lecture and discussion group four nights per month. After the fashion of Gertrude Stein's famous literary and artist salon in Paris, our special member guides our musings with tender loving care. Here is what Wikipedia has to say about salons and certain special women: "Women could be a powerful influence in the salon. Women were the center of the life in the salon and carried a very important role as regulators. They can select their guests and decide about the subjects of their meetings. Those subjects can be social, literary, or political. They also had the role as mediator by directing the discussion." Those who know will immediately recognize our special member in this Wiki description.
- One of our members conducts the operations of the Fellowship of Reason. This special member has an unsurpassed ability for planning, organization, and execution. Thanks to this special member, the world experiences the Fellowship of Reason as an efficient, responsive, and meticulous organization.
- One of our members is a flutist of exceptional talent. While her day job involves life and death evaluations of thousands of medical images, she is an artist in both fields: music and medicine. From time to time, she rehearses her instrument in order to thrill FOR audiences with her music.

These are just a few of the Super Men and Super Women of our acquaintance in the Fellowship of Reason. There are many more, but you get the idea.

There are several features of Super Powers that we call to your attention.

Literary Gigantism

In fantasy literature there are many super human beings. Superman, Batman, Wolverine, Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, the Human Torch, and the Thing are examples. The reader might

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 derives 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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Super Powers

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discount my title “Super Powers,” because the Super Powers of which I speak are quite different from the “powers” of fantasy Super Heroes.

Overstatement, hyperbole, magnification or gigantism is a common literary technique used to call attention to an event or person or feature for a variety of purposes (e.g. emphasis, ridicule, irony, humor, etc.). James Joyce uses the technique (he calls it “gigantism”) in the Cyclops chapter (12) of his famous tome, *Ulysses*. In one episode, the throwing of a biscuit tin after our hero Leopold Bloom causes an earthquake, saying of it: “there is no record extant of a similar seismic disturbance in our island since the earthquake of 1534.” Let us not be fooled into thinking that because of the prevalence of gigantism in literature that the thing magnified does not exist.

Human beings do have unique and special powers. It is the existence of these unique and special powers in real human beings that allows literature to magnify those powers in our imaginations.

The Right Circumstances

Unmagnified, a unique and special power has real-life features different from Superman’s fantasy powers. Recently, I was on a driving trip with a friend. We were pulling into a service station when we observed a lone driver pushing his automobile up the small hump between the roadway and the gas plaza of the service station. The driver was out of gas. My friend stopped our car in the road. I jumped out and helped push the other driver’s car to the gas pump. I exercised my Super Power. Here are the some of the features of my Super Power: I had the physical capacity (speed, strength, health, and mass) to help the man. I was in the right place at the right time. I was ready, willing, and able to help. It cost me nothing to help. It gave me pleasure to help. I was rewarded in the store of the service station by a hearty handshake and thank you from the other driver. At that moment, I exercised my Super Power. (Who, what, when, where, how, and why must all have correct responses in order to exercise a Super Power.)

A real-life Super Power is not merely a capacity to act, but also the circumstantial presence in place and time to be able to act. You

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might say, of course: "I could do that." My response is: "No, you could not. Only I was present at that moment and in that place."

Just like a real-life Super Power is not to be denied because it has not been magnified in fantasy, so it is not to be denied because, *in fantasy*, another person could exercise the Super Power. A real-life Super Power is to be distinguished from a fantasy Super Power by magnitude and circumstance.

So you see, our classic film expert, our salon hostess, our executive director, and our doctor/flutist, all are present the right place and at the right time to exercise their Super Powers. Who, what, when, where, how, and why? All answers are correct. One might fantastically say: "the stars are aligned."

Definition

A Super Power is a human ability exercised under circumstances presented to the actor providing the actor a deep and gratifying experience of being alive.

Readers will recognize within this definition mythologist Joseph Campbell's famous formulation:

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

— Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

The Meaning of Life

Having defined Super Powers let us turn to the second of the four goals of this essay which is to state the relationship between Super Power and the goal, meaning, and purpose of life.

There is a famous and ancient Hindu story illustrating the manifold nature of the truth. The story has many forms, but the gist follows. Four blind men are asked to touch an elephant and to describe what they have experienced. One touches the tail and says: "It is a rope." Another touches the side of the elephant and says: "It is a wall." The third touches a leg and says: "It is a tree." The fourth

A Super Power is a human ability exercised under circumstances presented to the actor providing to the actor a deep and gratifying experience of being alive.

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Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

touches the tusk and says: "It is a spear." The four blind men discuss their findings and fall into a violent quarrel over who is right.

In the same way, the goal, the meaning, and the purpose of life might be talking about the same Truth from slightly different perspectives, each one being an important part of the entire Truth.

In the Fellowship of Reason we assert, following Aristotle, that the purpose of life is happiness. Our philosophy is called Eudaimonism after the Greek, meaning "well-being-ism." Certainly, being happy and having well-being are related, if not identical.

Above we have quoted Joseph Campbell, who asserts that we are seeking deep experiences of being alive. His formulation, too, seems integrally related to happiness and well-being.

One of my personal favorites is the assertion that the goal of a man or a woman is the creation and preservation of the values that sustain human life.

How are these four ideas—happiness, well-being, deep experiences of being alive, and creating and preserving values—related? Well, I claim that they are all the same elephant—her tail, her side, her leg, and her tusk.

They are related by the concept of Super Powers as follows. In order to create and preserve the values that sustain human life, the actor must have Super Powers. The actor must exercise his Super Powers in the circumstances that are present to the actor. When the actor exercises his Super Powers, he or she enjoys a deep experience of being alive. Such an experience is also one of well-being. When one experiences well-being, one is happy. It is all the same elephant. The action is the exercise of the Super Power. The existential consequence of the action is the creation and preservation of the values that sustain human life. The physical consequence is well-being. The psychology consequence is happiness.

So, you see, Super Powers are a really big deal.

Finding Your Super Powers

Now let us explore the third of the four goals of this essay: How shall people find their Super Powers?

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

Martin at 770-471-9800
Susan at 678-358-8415

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Mythologist Joseph Campbell, again, has an answer for us: "Follow your bliss."

Montessori schools are all over this concept. The famous core of the Montessori program is to encourage the child to explore his or her environment with physical and mental activities, allowing the child to go down paths of his or her own choosing in order to discover the child's life passions.

We are all familiar with failures to "find your bliss." Many people are in jobs that do not provide for the worker "deep experiences of being alive."

We have said before that life has two demands: 1) survival, and 2) meaning. Survival comes before meaning and so one must have a job even if it is not the person's dream occupation. The quintessential image of the person who is following their bliss is the "starving young artist." She works as a waitress in New York while going to audition after audition seeking a role in which to exercise her Super Power, acting, dancing, singing, playing her instrument, whatever.

Sometimes, we discover our Super Powers only late.

In my own case, I have a little Super Power story. I studied French in middle school, high school, and college. When in 1990 Atlanta won the right to host the 1996 Summer Olympics, I wanted to be a volunteer and so I started to work on my French, the second official language of the Olympic Games. I started classes at l'Alliance Française d'Atlanta. We hosted French visitors in our home. We travelled to French speaking countries. When the Olympics came, I was a volunteer. I continued with my French thereafter. Just over two years ago, the French teacher quit at my son's Montessori school and the school, after 35 years teaching only French, switched to Spanish. I became the French teacher to six legacy 11th graders who had studied French for 11 years and did not want to switch to Spanish. My students have graduated. Nevertheless, I was invited back to teach French to five more 10th graders who wanted to study French. So, I am exercising my Super Power as the volunteer French teacher at my son's Montessori school.

On the whole and for the most part, parents have Super Powers. They are Super Parents. Circumstantially, my wife and I are the best possible parents for our two beloved sons. See how this works: By exercising our Super Powers as parents, my wife and I are creating and preserving values that sustain human life, to wit: our children. While doing so, we enjoy deep experiences of being alive. We and our children enjoy physical and mental well-being. We are flourishing. We are happy in our parenting. And this can be said for every parent in the Fellowship of Reason and for most parents in the world.

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

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Sometimes, very often in the case of parenting, a meaningful existence is gifted.

For those not gifted with meaning, I do not propose that I can improve on Joseph Campbell's advice: "Follow you bliss."

The Fellowship of Reason and Super Powers

Our final topic is the relationship between the Fellowship of Reason and Super Powers.

The Fellowship of Reason survives and thrives on the Super Powers of our members. We are unique among moral communities* in this respect.

*The Program for our monthly meeting called FORum has this to say about moral communities:
A moral community is a community of persons united by a common interest in a particular moral philosophy. Example: A religious congregation is a faith-based moral community. A reason-based moral community is a community of persons united by a common interest in a reason-based moral philosophy. Example: The Fellowship of Reason® is a rational moral community.

Here is a secret known only to our leadership about FORum. Once a person performs at FORum, he or she will take a greater interest in the Fellowship of Reason by seeking a leadership role or increasing their membership level to Contributing or Lifetime. (After Vera Norman recounted her amazing life story at FORum (she was a Holocaust survivor), she devoted the remainder of her life to supporting the Fellowship of Reason, among her many other interests.)

Please do not tell anyone about this secret.

The reason is that in performing at FORum the performer is exercising his or her Super Power! Whether the performance is Master of Ceremonies, Sunday school, Celebration of Freedom, Celebration of Talent, or Oratory, the performer enjoys a deep experience of being alive. The performer creates and preserves values that sustain human life. The performer experiences well-being. The performer flourishes. The performer is happy.

Such is the gift of exercising one's Super Power.

Notice our rules, too. We have only one rule: stay within the time limits. We never pre-screen a performer. We never order, prescribe or proscribe a topic. We (the leadership of FOR) know what we are looking for. We are looking for an exposition of the performer's passions. We want to see what gives the performer deep experiences of being alive. As a consequence,

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we, the audience, enjoy a performance that is passionate, informative, and very important, often sacred. FORum is frequently a thrilling experience for the audience, especially for insiders (you are now all insiders) who know what is going on.

Our special members, called out at the beginning of this essay, the classic film expert, the salon hostess, the executive director, and our doctor/musician, and all of our performers in all of their capacities, behind the scenes or on the stage of FORum, exercise their Super Powers because of the gift that follows.

Conclusion

Lest I disappoint my loving critics (who are themselves exercising Super Powers in their criticism), I cannot shrink from pointing out the relationship between Super Powers and the Beautiful. The Beautiful, as I have said (following St. Thomas Aquinas), consists in wholeness, harmony and radiance.

When a person exercises her Super Power, she experiences wholeness. Her whole person is performing at full capacity. Her internal state (her deeply held values and interests) and her external reality (her actions) are in harmony. The result is radiance of experience for the performer and for the audience. It is a Beautiful thing to witness the exercise of Super Powers. It is Beautiful thing to exercise one's own Super Powers.

We have learned that Super Powers are not fantastic. A Super Power is a human-size capacity exercised when the right answers to the questions who, what, when, where, how, and why are present. We have learned that when a Super Power is exercised, values that sustain human life are created and preserved, the actor enjoys deep experiences of being alive, she has well-being, she flourishes, and she is happy. We have learned the while some Super Powers are gifted (like parenthood); others are found by following your bliss. We have learned that the Fellowship of Reason is uniquely aware of Super Powers and provides our members with opportunities to exercise their own Super Powers.

Look! Up in the sky!

It's a bird!

It's a plane!

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...

...

No. It's you!

Events

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

Adult Sunday school at FORum: 1st Sunday 10 a.m.

Members and friends of FOR are invited to attend Adult Sunday School before FORum on the first Sunday of every month at 10 a.m. at the Atlanta Freethought Hall, located at 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA 30080.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

FORum: A Celebration of Human Achievement: First Sunday 11 a.m.

FOR's premier event. Meet and greet at 10:30 a.m. The program starts at 11 a.m. Presided over by FOR's President, members give presentations such as Celebration of Freedom and Celebration of Talent. A 15 to 20 minute Oratory on an ethical subject highlights the program. A short conversation called FORum during which audience members share their thoughts concludes the program at 12 noon sharp. We enjoy post-program conversation at local restaurant for further fellowship. Children's Program babysitter from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 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, near Candler Park at the Flying Biscuit, 1655 McLendon Avenue Northeast, Atlanta. Breakfast at the Flying Biscuit follows at 9:15 a.m. Breakfast lovers, walkers, and joggers welcome! Martin Cowen: 678-641-9321

Taped Lectures/Discussion Group: 1st / 3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

A small group of friends listens to taped lectures 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.

Fifteen members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at an undisclosed location.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

Fiction Book Club—Saturday Edition: 2nd Saturday of even numbered months 11 a.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet at 11 a.m. on the 2nd Saturday of every EVEN month at Susan Menich's house to discuss a Literary Classic.

Remember it is potluck so bring some breakfast food or drink to share.

Susan Menich, coordinator, 770-396-0483

Kids' Adventure: 3rd Saturday, 11 a.m. Saturday, TBA

Kristie Gonzalez coordinator: 404-428-9078

Poetry Club: 4th Saturday, 3:00 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR like to meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at a local coffee shop to share their enjoyment of poetry.

Trent Watkins, coordinator

Ulysses Study Group: 5th Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Potluck

Members and friends of FOR are invited to attend a years-long study group of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. We meet at Sally's house on the 5th Tuesdays of months with a 5th Tuesday.

Remember it is potluck so bring some breakfast food or drink to share. Martin Cowen: 678-641-9321

Join us for our next monthly FORum:

4775 N. Church Lane, S.E., Smyrna, GA 30080

March 2, 2014 Sunday 11 a.m.

(Meet, Greet at 10:30 a.m.)

FOR Children's Babysitter

from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Organized Educational Program from 10:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Adult Sunday school
10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

Birthdays

February 2	Wendell Bettis
February 5	Michael Norman
February 23	Ellen Lewit

March 4	Scott Carper
March 22	Toni Brookner
March 25	Claire Gloeckner
March 29	Paul Storey

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

FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.

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We are on the Web!

See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com