



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON®

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The official newsletter of  
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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## Education to Become a Doer

By Ron Menich

### Education to Become a Doer

"Everybody's workin for the weekend!"

#### Passage 1

Susan and I were eating at a restaurant in Positano on the beautiful Amalfi Coast south of Naples, Italy. A British couple were sitting behind us and we were engaging in conversation with them. The husband was telling us about the great trips they take. They'd taken 3 weeks in Spain and were now taking 3 weeks in Italy, if memory serves. I don't remember what his occupation was, but I do remember him saying, "I don't live to work, I work to live". He said that I need to take more vacations and not take work so seriously.

#### Passage 2

Not two months go by on Facebook before someone re-posts, "5 Things People Regret on Their Deathbed", including "2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard". Another thing folk re-post often is, "The 10 Words You Won't Say...On Your Deathbed" which are, "If only I had spent more time at the office."

The passages above remind us to live a life that is full and rich, not only in the workplace but beyond as well. We all live vicariously through our members the Bauers as they go on their many excellent foreign vacations. Please do live a flourishing and joyful life, take vacations and be happy.

However, the above passages also have a much darker side, one that represents an alienation from work that is all too typical. Many if not most people have severely misaligned lives in which the job they perform 40 or more hours a week for decades on end is not something that they really enjoy, but rather is merely a means to get money and something from which they wish to escape.

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## Education to Become a Doer

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This is not so for all people. A former colleague of mine, Pete, has two sons. The younger son Ryan decided at age 16 that he wanted to study hospitality management in college. He set his sights on that apex of education in that particular subfield, namely, the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, and proceeded to matriculate there when he graduated from high school. He ripped through college and afterwards moved to Manhattan, where he took various impressive jobs at high-end restaurants and hotels.

After a few years, he moved back home and back into his parents' house in Roswell. He began to construct a business plan to open a restaurant. He created a concept and provisional menu for the restaurant, and then studied the competitive local Roswell restaurant market, carefully characterizing each in his business plan document. He met with investors and they funded his plan. He purchased an old house in downtown Roswell, created the plans for his restaurant, and supervised nearly every aspect of the restoration of the building and the site. He created the menus. He hired executive chefs and wait staff. Finally, at the age of 26, he opened a "simple, Southern and seasonal" high-end restaurant called, Table and Main, at 1028 Canton Street. It's a fine restaurant and I encourage you to visit. Please go to the website and you'll see a video in which Ryan Pernice talks about his restaurant and what it offers.

Ryan works from 10 to 14 hours per day, six days per week. His main business happens on the weekends, so I guess in some sense he is indeed, "working for the weekend". But Ryan is such a switched-on individual that he is definitely not alienated from his work; rather, he *is* his work.

One restaurant was not enough for this superman. In 2013, Ryan opened a second restaurant at 1095 Canton Street called Osteria Mattone,

"Roswell's newest neighborhood restaurant serving regional Italian cuisine with a heavy focus on Roman fare, combining the casual spirit of an osteria with the more formal dining of a trattoria."

As part of the research for this essay, Susan and I visited Osteria Mattone last weekend. Ryan's older brother Dan greeted us as we entered. I highly-recommend the grilled octopus; it is at least as good or better than the already-excellent octopus at either Kyma or Eclipse de Luna. We had a wonderful dinner, and I highly recommend that you visit Osteria Mattone.

Ryan completed his undergraduate studies in 2007; today, he's probably only 30 years of age. What an amazing young man! The next time on Facebook that you

### 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

**Fellowship of Reason**

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see someone re-post “5 Things People Regret on Their Deathbed...2. I wish I hadn’t worked so hard” or “The 10 Words You Won’t Say...On Your Deathbed... If only I had spent more time at the office.”, I would like you to reflect on the amazing young man I just described and ask yourself what relevance if any those Facebook posts have for him. Ryan Pernice is not alienated from his work. Work is not just something that he does in order to get some money so that he can then do other things on the weekend. Rather, Ryan’s life is aligned.

Ayn Rand is a philosopher and author whom many of us have read in detail. Her novels are romantic, idealistic and definitely not meant to be realistic. Her heroes are those who are intensely productive. In *The Fountainhead*, the protagonist is Howard Roark, a passionate architect who lives to build amazing edifices. He is not motivated by finding designs to please a large market; indeed, Rand portrays in a very poor light other architects who chase after the latest architectural fad, copying the most popular designs. Roark’s outlook, by contrast, is that he needs to recruit one or a small number of customers to help him to attain his vision. Roark does not work to live; rather, he lives to work. He has purpose --- to create --- and he is very productive towards that end.

*Atlas Shrugged* is another Ayn Rand novel which is populated by many intensely productive characters. Dagny Taggart is the Chief Operating Officer of the Taggart Transcontinental railroad, a powerful woman who set her sights on running the railroad when she was but a child, and who doggedly pursued that goal across decades. Hank Rearden is another major character, an industrialist who runs a steel mill and invents an amazing new metal alloy.

A minor character in *Atlas Shrugged* is the composer Richard Halley. Richard Halley has an amazing knowledge of music, but music appreciation is not what defines Richard Halley. Rather, it is that he *composes* incredible concerti. Halley does not run a railroad, steel mill, or other industrial venture; he is in the arts. But Richard Halley, like Dagny Taggart, Howard Roark, and many other Ayn Rand heroes, is a productive doer. Let us hear Ayn Rand’s thoughts on Productiveness:

“The virtue of *Productiveness* is the recognition of the fact that productive work is the process by which man’s mind sustains his life, the process that sets man free of the necessity to adjust himself to his background, as all animals do, and gives him the power to adjust his background to himself. Productive work is the road of man’s unlimited achievement and calls upon the highest attributes of his character: his creative ability, his ambitiousness, his self-assertiveness, his refusal to bear uncontested disasters, his dedication to the goal of reshaping the earth in the image of his values. “Productive work” does not mean the unfocused performance of the

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motions of some job. It means the consciously chosen pursuit of a productive career, in any line of rational endeavor, great or modest, on any level of ability. It is not the degree of a man's ability nor the scale of his work that is ethically relevant here, but the fullest and most purposeful use of his mind."

Most people are not Ryan Pernices who open their own high-end restaurant at age 26, nor do most people resemble Ayn Rand heroes. Unfortunately, most people wander through life: a typical trajectory is to do so-so in high school and to then go to college and switch majors a couple of times, all the while thinking no further ahead than this weekend's keg party. After college is finished, a typical person gets a job doing something unrelated to what they studied in college. They then proceed to accumulate possessions --- a car, a house, a boat --- and then focus their lives outside of work. In the process of accumulating things, a typical person incurs significant debt, requiring that they continue to work at their unfulfilling job to pay off that debt. Then come children and the need to pay college tuition continues the need to work at the unfulfilling occupation to pay off yet more debt. Then the typical individual ages and learns that they've not paid enough attention to saving for retirement --- retirement which this individual craves because they do not fundamentally like working.

If a person works 40 hours per week for 40 years at a job or jobs they don't really care to have, that represents 80,000 hours of personal alienation. To me, being alienated from what one is doing for 80,000 hours of one's life is a great tragedy, and I suggest that it behooves us to consider how we might get more young people to be like Ryan Pernice, heroes who enjoy their work thoroughly. I submit that it is better to enjoy what one is doing for the 80,000 hours ones spends at work, than to feel alienated from it. How can we create more Howard Roarks? More Dagny Taggart? More Richard Halleys? More Elon Musks?

The FOR Board of Trustees is sponsoring an essay contest. I support the essay context. Recently the Board was considering the wording of an announcement of this contest. An early version of the announcement had the following wording in it:

"The Fellowship of Reason loves Liberal Education. Liberal Education is that learning appropriate for a free person. In a phrase, a Liberal Education is a thorough study of the Great Books of the Western Tradition."

There are many who extol the virtues of an education which focuses on reading of the classics. However, I am not one of them, and when I first saw this wording, my reaction was swift and negative. I thought to myself about Dagny Taggart and what she would consider to be a "Great Book": that would likely be a locomotive maintenance manual. A Great Book for Hank Rearden would likely be his lab

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**Regular membership:**  
\$35 per year

**Contributing membership:**  
\$70 per Year

**Lifetime membership:**  
\$700

notebooks which recounted the 1000 times he tried to create Rearden metal and failed, before finally succeeding and changing the world of metallurgy. Ryan Pernice didn't devote his undergraduate studies to Greek history, philosophy, poetry and reading the classics; rather, he studied hotel and restaurant management. The fact that he did so enabled him to open two high-end restaurants before age 30.

Twice a month, I thoroughly enjoy Taped Lecture Discussion Series at Sally Hull's house. Most recently we are studying ancient Greek history. Over time, we've studied philosophy extensively, we've studied poetry and beauty, linguistics, history, and other subjects. We eat and drink; we listen to a segment; we discuss that segment; we listen to a second segment; we discuss the second segment; and then we break for the evening. I have an absolutely wonderful time at Taped Lecture Discussion Series.

I also occasionally attend Poetry Club, and marvel at the energy that Trent, Frank and others bring to the table, reviewing the poems, histories, and techniques a very diverse set of poets and musicians.

Keeping one's mind active with philosophy clubs, poetry clubs, fiction and non-fiction book clubs, movie clubs and more --- these are all fine activities which FOR sponsors under its umbrella. Most of these activities involve study of what might be called the liberal arts. I am proud that it does so, and I encourage each of you to attend these other FOR activities and thereby enrich your life. Please also start and lead new FOR activities for which you have great energy, and you will enrich the rest of us in the process.

That being said, I really, really struggle with the notion of encouraging a young person to go to college to study the classics. I do not grasp how encouraging a young person to study Plato, Greek history, or poetry leads to that young person becoming a productive doer. My goal is not to encourage young people to appreciate history and philosophy and music and poetry --- a person can learn that at any point in life via philosophy clubs and book clubs and the like. Rather, my goal is to encourage young people to become Ryan Pernices, Dagny Taggarts, Hank Reardens and Richard Halleys. My goal is to encourage young people to think about the 80,000 hours that they will spend at work, and whether they want that time to be a joy or whether they want that time to be drudgery.

I would encourage young people to think about what subjects are best learned in an academic environment, versus what knowledge can be learned via continuing education at any point in one's life. Yesterday, Susan, Ira, and I walked past the Shakespeare Theater on our way to DragonCon. Eating, drinking, and watching and listening to a Shakespeare play is something that a person can do at any age, and some of our FOR members do regularly visit the Shakespeare Theater. By contrast, I submit that learning the calculus of integration and differentiation is better

### 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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performed in an academic environment, because there is a need to complete exercises and, quite frankly, it is difficult and being in an academic environment in which a group of people are sweating over the same material helps. Learning skills is tough. Make sure to do that in school.

Some believe that a significant purpose of education is to indoctrinate youth in beliefs or behaviors that are useful to society. We might call this the social engineering approach to education. For example, students in public schools study American history and civics and they are encouraged to recycle trash; these areas of study reflect community values and the study of American history and civics is meant to create a populace who will continue the American experiment. In the early version of the FOR Essay Contest announcement, the following wording was present:

“Martha Craven Nussbaum (American philosopher, b. 1947- ) says: “An education that is 'liberal' in that it liberates the mind from bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world.” The Fellowship of Reason would like to encourage young people to pursue a Liberal Education in order to become free people.”

I am most certainly a fan of freedom, and my referencing of Ayn Rand characters is not accidental. However, the provisional wording of the essay announcement seems to me to reflect a public school-like desire to indoctrinate youth in a particular way of thinking. It is aiming towards a particular societal outcome rather than focusing on the impact of education on the individual. It is not that that societal outcome is bad. But my reaction to that was also negative, because I hope that education supports first and foremost the individual, that the individual might get lit on fire by ideas and be able to spend the 80,000 hours of their life at work in a joyful pursuit of their purpose rather than in drudgery.

One way to approach archery is to fire a bunch of arrows, see where they land, paint a target in the center of the spread of the arrows, and to then declare victory. Jeffrey Fagen, Ph.D., Dean of the St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, says:

“It’s the flexibility and the translational skills that students get in the liberal arts—the heavy emphasis on critical thinking, writing, and speaking. It prepares students not only for careers today, but for careers that don’t even exist today...Nowadays, it’s predicted that students will change careers five or six times in their lifetimes. If you have a liberal arts education, you can easily move from one discipline to another because you learn how to learn.”

Flexibility is good, and indeed, a typical person may change careers several times during their lifetimes. But the idea that students should head towards nothing in particular in college in order to be flexible is, to me, dreadful advice. If one actually wants to hit a target with an arrow --- a worthwhile target such as spending one’s

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80,000 hours at work fulfilling one's dream rather than living each hour looking at the clock, looking ahead towards quitting time --- then one should carefully take aim with the purpose of hitting that target.

To become excellent at archery, one aims first at a nearby static target while mastering correct form. Then one learns to hit a more distant static target. Then one practices hitting moving targets. Then one gets on horseback and learns to hit static targets. Finally, one learns to hit moving targets while riding on horseback. The fact that both archer and target might eventually be moving does not nullify the need to initially practice firing at a static target, nor should it lead to a decision not to practice archery at all and simply do pushups instead. Pushups are useful --- strength helps in archery. But pushups do not replace learning to hit static and moving targets.

There might be those who think the archery analogy irrelevant. I submit that the archery analogy is directly relevant. Archery is a skill, something that one does rather than just something about which one knows.

One pushback often heard is that a young person doesn't yet know what they want to be, that is, they do not know which target they wish to hit. Few, it is argued, are like Ryan Pernice who decided at age 16 to study restaurant and hospitality management. But today's students have the internet at their fingertips and could, at least theoretically, have endless means of finding out ahead of time what people do in their jobs, what they get paid, and so forth. Just for fun, I typed, "What is it like to be a mechanical engineer" into google, and instantly got many links in return, including a Quora article of that exact title. I typed in, "what are earnings for restaurant owners" and received back many links. LinkedIn and meetup and other channels can enable students to get in touch with successful people and to learn about them. In comparison to the resources I had, today's students have a cornucopia of resources at their fingertips to assist them in choosing an appropriate target of their endeavors.

But today's educational system is oriented towards studying Shakespeare, taking art classes and learning how to recycle, and not oriented towards studying local entrepreneurs like Ryan Pernice who shape our world, and not oriented towards assisting students in identifying the best target to hit. True, schools do have career counselors. But career counselors are a sideshow, and our schools are not primarily oriented around assisting students to transition from studying generalities to becoming a doer. Productiveness is a virtue, but moving from learning the Three Rs to becoming a blazing, productive fountain of thriving, flourishing awesomeness is a complex, difficult path.

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But perhaps doing and being productive is for the little people. Perhaps we all secretly aspire to have had inherited wealth and to have attended Eton and to not have to sully ourselves with starting corporations or being productive or learning skills or other such grimy things. How much finer it would be to just study the Classics and music and art and to spend our days doing philanthropy and living the type of lives we see on *Downton Abbey*. As one author notes,

“Education is one of those things that truly sets the aristocracy apart from the rest of society... Education is what gives the aristocratic world its spark. An aristocrat should know the following before claiming to pursue the aristocratic ideal: ...A knowledge of the great Greek philosophers, their main tenants and key movements in the West which challenged these schools.... Beyond a thorough knowledge of English, a reading/spoken knowledge of French, German, Italian and Spanish is also necessary. A reading knowledge of Latin, and at least some Greek is also necessary... A knowledge of History, at least enough to know the order of the ages of Europe: Antique, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Enlightenment, Victorian, Modern; and to know the elements significant of each...A knowledge of Literature, having read works from each of the ages listed above...A knowledge of music whether [or not] one can sing or play an instrument.”

Lazlo Bock is in charge of all hiring at google, and was recently interviewed by Thomas Friedman regarding what is important to him:

“Bock’s remarks generated a lot of reader response, particularly his point that prospective bosses today care less about what you know or where you learned it — the Google machine knows everything now — than what value you can create with what you know.”

““My belief is not that one shouldn’t go to college,” said Bock. It is that among 18- to 22-year-olds — or people returning to school years later — “most don’t put enough thought into why they’re going, and what they want to get out of it.” Of course, we want an informed citizenry, where everyone has a baseline of knowledge from which to build skills. That is a social good. But, he added, don’t just go to college because you think it is the right thing to do and that any bachelor’s degree will suffice. “The first and most important thing is to be explicit and willful in making the decisions about what you want to get out of this investment in your education.” It’s a huge investment of time, effort and money and people should think “incredibly hard about what they’re getting in return.”

Once there, said Bock, make sure that you’re getting out of it not only a broadening of your knowledge but skills that will be valued in today’s workplace. Your college degree is not a proxy anymore for having the skills or traits to do any job.”

Become an archery expert first. Later, do continuing education by attending Taped Lecture Discussion Series, Poetry Club, visiting the Shakespeare Theater, and other FOR activities.

Thank you for listening.



## Events

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

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**Adult Sunday school at FORum:** 1<sup>st</sup> 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

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**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.

Martin Cowen director: 678-641-9321.

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**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

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**Taped Lectures/Discussion Group:** 1<sup>st</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

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**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

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**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

**Join us for our  
next monthly  
FORum:**

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

**May 1, 2015  
Sunday 11 a.m.**

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

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

## Birthdays

April 9	Kathleen Allen
April 9	Erik Bauer
April 9	Kate Miller
April 13	Beth Rivera
April 24	Peter Brookner
April 24	Susan Menich

May 2	Frank Vickers
May 21	Dan Barber

## 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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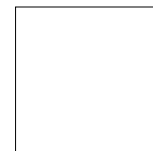
A Reason-Based Moral  
Community



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**We are on the Web!**

See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com