



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON®

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The official newsletter of  
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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## A Rational Moral Community

By Martin Cowen

Oratory delivered at FORum 7/2/17

The Fellowship of Reason begins our 20<sup>th</sup> year on November 1, 2017. Our first meeting was on November 1, 1998. We will have completed 228 consecutive monthly FORums on that date. Today is our 225<sup>th</sup> consecutive monthly FORum. Our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary is Sunday, November 4, 2018.

The subtitle of my book *Fellowship of Reason* is *A Moral Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Note we are a *moral* community, a *rational moral* community.

I heard a podcast the other day. The podcaster observed that atheists are at a great ethical disadvantage compared with Christians. Christians have an objective ethical system. Most atheists are ethical relativists and are morally ungrounded. Too many atheists are attracted to atheistic ideologies seeking some ethical grounding. Many of those ideologies are totalitarian in essence.

The podcaster, who does have an objective ethical system and who has written a book on the subject, argues that it is the job of philosophy to supply an objective ethical system in the absence of religion. Of course, the Fellowship of Reason has done so. I am chastened though that the Fellowship of Reason has not addressed ethical questions for several years.

Therefore, I return to ethics with this Oratory.

Our favorite ethical philosopher is Aristotle and so I will spend the next five minutes rehearsing the ethics of Aristotle.

Aristotle's virtues are observation of character traits commonly believed to be human excellences. Aristotle's character virtues are these:

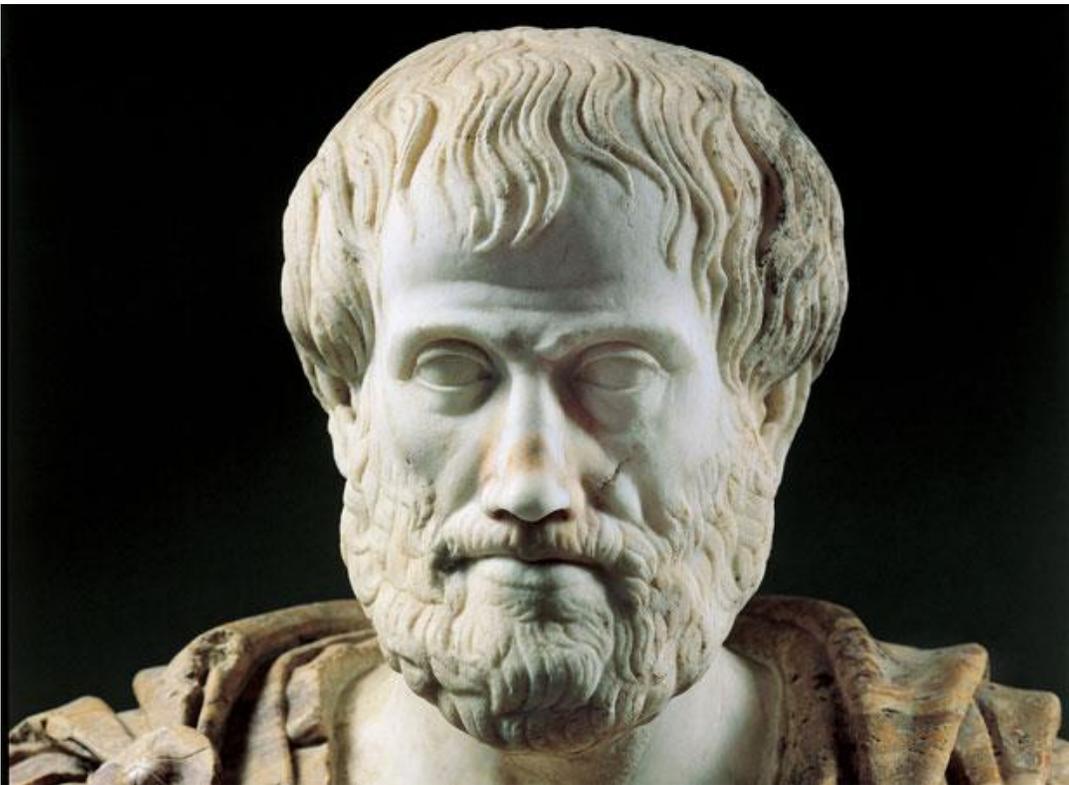
1. Courage
2. Temperance
3. Generosity
4. Magnificence

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## A Rational Moral Community

5. Magnanimity
6. Appetite for honor (pride)
7. Gentleness
8. Truthfulness
9. Charmingness
10. Friendliness
11. Sense of shame
12. Righteous indignation
13. Justice



Aristotle identifies these intellectual virtues:

1. Practical judgment
2. Knowledge
3. Wisdom

Aristotle does not *prove* his character virtues, he recites them. Aristotle's virtues are observations about what people generally think/believe are human excellences. Who can disagree? Do not we all regard these character traits as virtues?

✓ Courage

### 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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## A Rational Moral Community

- ✓ Temperance
- ✓ Generosity
- ✓ Magnificence
- ✓ Magnanimity
- ✓ Appetite for honor (pride)
- ✓ Gentleness
- ✓ Truthfulness
- ✓ Charmingness
- ✓ Friendliness
- ✓ Sense of shame
- ✓ Righteous indignation
- ✓ Justice

Aristotle's excellences are means between two extremes. So, for example, courage is regarded as a mean between cowardice and rashness; temperance is a mean between insensibility and dissipation; generosity is a mean between wastefulness and stinginess; magnificence is a mean between chintziness and gaudiness or vulgarity; greatness of soul is a mean between smallness of soul and vanity; gentleness is a mean between irritability and slowness to anger; and, truthfulness is a mean between irony and bragging. Aristotle evaluates all of the human excellences in the following form: To be courageous is to act courageously at the right time, in the right place, for the right reason, and to the right decree. Aristotle has a "who, what, when, where, why, and how" criteria for personal excellences.

Perhaps you will recall that we were very excited about Joe Sachs's translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Professor Sachs translates an important Ancient Greek word in Aristotle "*to kalon*" as "the beautiful". So that Aristotle says in translation that "moral virtues are for the sake of the beautiful". One is courageous or temperate or generous, for the sake of the beautiful.

As I was preparing this short oratory I remembered that precisely *this issue*, the meaning of "*to kalon*", shifted my interest from the study of ethics to the study of the beautiful. If beauty was the standard of the ethical then the study of the beautiful, for the sake of the ethical, was in order. Is ethics co-extensive with aesthetics?

For several years now we have been looking at the beautiful in FOR

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Sunday School. We have looked at the art of Pieter Bruegel, Vincent van Gogh, John Martin, J.M.W. Turner, Johannes Vermeer, Caravaggio, Hans Gude, and the Hudson River School. We have looked at the music of Samuel Barber, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Aaron Copland.

While looking and listening to these great artists and musicians is an end in itself, the impulse to examine them had its source in Aristotle and Aristotle's claim that we act ethically because acting ethically is the beautiful thing to do. (What a lovely formulation!)

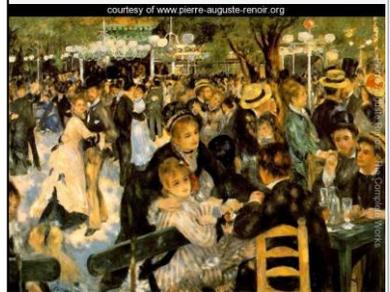
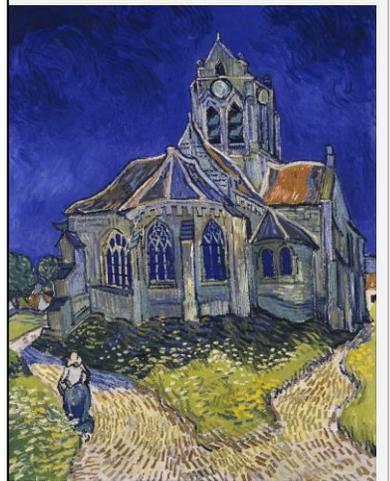
*Consequentialism* is a moral doctrine that asserts that the morality of an action is to be judged solely on the basis of its consequences. Aristotle's view is contrary to consequentialism. Aristotle asserts that the morality of an action is to be judged by its beauty. Acting ethically is, for Aristotle, an end itself. Aristotle's ethics is categorized as *virtue ethics*, focusing upon the character of the actor. Christian ethics is in an ethical category named *deontological ethics*, or duty ethics. A fourth category of ethics is *pragmatic ethics*.

One of the challenges for me in giving an oratory on ethics to a group of mature adults is that I can teach you, my peers, nothing about virtue. We are all virtuous else we would not be here. We all share the Aristotelian virtues:

- ✓ Courage
- ✓ Temperance
- ✓ Generosity
- ✓ Magnificence
- ✓ Magnanimity
- ✓ Appetite for honor (pride)
- ✓ Gentleness
- ✓ Truthfulness
- ✓ Charmingness
- ✓ Friendliness
- ✓ Sense of shame
- ✓ Righteous indignation
- ✓ Justice

So, beyond rehearsing our common ethical bond, what is there to do?

Aristotle also famously says that "man is the rational animal" and



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

“man is the social animal.” Perhaps it is here that I can make a minor suggestion.

I think we can all agree that for at least the last year some people have gone crazy over politics. TDS, Trump Derangement Syndrome, has become an epidemic. My own political views are so marginalized that my group has never enjoyed more than about a 3% showing in the polls so I am used to losing. I am used to keeping my mouth shut about politics on the whole and for the most part. I do recognize that I, personally, have had some remarkable failures in the “keeping my mouth shut” policy.

I do not intend to violate that policy here. I would however like to mention our friend Kate Allen, who is no longer a member. She is running for the U.S. House of Representatives. Kate, over her years with us, gave us a number of speeches advocating her political views. It is safe to say that she was not “preaching to the choir” here. Her oratories were excellent, well researched and well delivered. They were received warmly by us and with gratitude. While some of the audience agreed with her political views, some of the audience did not. Kate Allen was a model of Aristotelian virtue. She exhibited courage, temperance, generosity, gentleness, truthfulness, charmingness, friendliness, and justice. She recognized her role in our society. She used reason to try to persuade her audience. Her motive was to do good for her society.

Kate most certainly does not share my political views. And while she may be suffering from TDS, she has responded to the current political environment in a very positive way. She is running for the U.S. House of Representatives. So rather than complaining and wearing a pink hat at useless protests, she is taking positive action to enact her political views.

So here is my moral prodding in this oratory.

### Idea #1

When we see a friend who is suffering from TDS, mention Kate Allen. Talk admiringly of Kate’s Aristotelian virtues. Mention that she is running for Congress. Mention that she has courage, temperance, generosity, gentleness, truthfulness, charmingness, friendliness, and justice. Mention how much you admire a person who actually acts rather than simply complaining.

Maybe your friend suffering from TDS will get the message that

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whining is neither attractive nor useful.

### Idea #2

One of my favorite new concepts is “virtue signaling”. A friend who lives in small town Georgia told me that she keeps a dollar bill in her pocket book to give to a homeless person on the street. Now I do not know about you, but I have never seen a homeless person in her small town.

On the other hand, that same friend, who is a Presbyterian, told me a story about a ne'er-do-well visitor, who briefly attended their downtown Presbyterian Church, and galled the regular congregation by actually speaking out during the service, saying things like “Amen” and “Praise God”. That visitor was not so-enough gone.

Virtue signaling means you pretend to other people that you are generous in order to gain approval while in truth not being very generous at all.

My suggestion to my fellow Aristotelians is to gently prod those around you who you know are virtue signaling. If they are signaling that they are trivially generous with the poor, suggest to them that perhaps a more meaningful way to help would be to volunteer monthly at a homeless shelter. Or, in the case of people who are open borders advocates, ask them how many refugees they have taken into their homes lately or how many foster children in case they do not want to go foreign.

That same small town Georgia friend recently virtue signaled on Facebook. She said she could not understand how people were so chintzy (the low extreme of Aristotle's virtue of magnificence) and not want to pay more taxes for welfare programs. I do not know if anyone reminded my friend that she was free to pay the government more in taxes than was due or, even better, to do that volunteering in a homeless shelter or a food kitchen.

My fellow Aristotelians, I call upon us to gently push back on “virtue signaling” when we see it. You will be enacting all of the Aristotelian virtues in that action:

✓ Courage

## A Rational Moral Community

- ✓ Temperance
- ✓ Generosity
- ✓ Magnificence
- ✓ Magnanimity
- ✓ Appetite for honor (pride)
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- ✓ Justice

### Idea #3

Pathological altruism is advocating “good” deeds towards others that have some very bad unintended consequences. For Aristotle, generosity and magnificence are virtues. The difference between the two pertains to the amount involved. Generosity involves modest amounts. Magnificence involves very large amounts. Andrew Carnegie's creation of 3,000 public libraries is magnificent. Sally Hull's hosting members of the Fellowship of Reason in her home three or four times per month for decades is generosity. Members of the Fellowship of Reason, endorse generosity and magnificence.



One of the most horrible examples of pathological altruism comes

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from India where a March 19, 2014 story in the South China Morning Post reports that criminal gangs are crippling children and forcing them to be beggars. The crippled children elicit more compassion from passersby and therefore more donations. I have saved for over a decade a story about Indian children being enclosed in jars so that they grow up deformed for the same purpose.

Another example of pathological altruism is the gift of food to African countries. These gifts, assuming they get past the warlords, destroy the local market for food grown in the country making self-sufficiency impossible.

Even the giving of the dollar to the homeless person on the street can be seen as supporting bad habits or, in some cases, an outright fraud where the so-called homeless person goes home every night to a warm bath and a bed in his home.

As an Aristotelian, we can be aware of the potential for unintended consequences in the case of our own acts of generosity and magnificence. And in the case of our friends, we can gently question them about the possible negative consequences of their altruistic actions.

### Conclusion

So, in conclusion, we have revisited Aristotle's ethics. We can see that his thirteen character virtues, while not proven, are obvious.

I have called us Aristotelians to action by (1) recognizing the virtue of acting to pursue your goals (like Kate Allen) rather than merely whining about losing, by (2) subtlety and with grace calling out "virtue signaling" when witnessed among your friends, and by (3) while recognizing that generosity and magnificence are among our Aristotelian virtues, pathological altruism exists and we need to be aware of it.

Thank you for your attention and "live long and prosper".

## Events

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

**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

**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.

**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:** 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. Potluck supper precedes the lecture.

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. Potluck supper precedes the event.

Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

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

Members and friends of FOR like to meet on the 4th Saturday of every month at San Francisco Coffee, 676 N. Highland Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307, to share their love of poetry.

Frank Vickers, coordinator

**FOR Rocks Stone Mountain:** Saturday before FORum at 3 p.m.

Strong members of the Fellowship of Reason hike up Stone Mountain starting at the Confederate Hall Historical Center on the West side of the mountain near the outdoor restrooms.

Claire Glockner, coordinator

**FOR Pub:** last Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR like to meet at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30307, on the last Wednesday, at 7 p.m. for adult beverages and fun.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

**FOR Epicures:** TBA Monday, 7:00 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR like to meet at fine restaurant on a Monday evening at 7 p.m. about every 90 days.

Claire Glockner, coordinator

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

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

**August 6, 2017  
Sunday 11 a.m.**  
(Meet, Greet at 10:30 a.m.)

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

## Birthdays

July 25	David Van Mersbergen
July 29	Ben Bradley
July 31	Linda Cowen

August 18	Carlos Franco
August 18	Dunham McAllister
August 27	Mandy Bauer
August 28	Tom Welch
August 31	Allison A. Tuner-Hansen

## 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!



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