



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON®

February 2015, Vol. 17 No. 2

The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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Does Reason Work?

(A second look)

By Martin L. Cowen III

As you may recall we discussed the question "Does Reason Work" in last month's *The Eudaimonist*. We proposed a series of meetings to explore whether, in fact, we can come to an agreement on some disputed topic. In anticipation of our meeting, the essay had these suggestions: (1) pick a small topic, (2) learn facts first before discussing policy, (3) avoid confirmation bias, (4) the problem of motivation (who cares whether reason works?), (5) which moral code to apply, (6) let's do philosophy not sophistry, (7) we will have to avoid politically incorrect topics, and (8) some suggested topics.

We met as planned and a brief report of the meeting follows. After this report, we will review what we learned.

We met on Saturday, February 7, 2015, at 3 p.m., at the Thinking Man Tavern. The space was adequate, but in an open dining room with no privacy and too loud. Next month, we will meet again on Saturday, March 7, 2015, at 3 p.m. in the Eagle's Nest of Manuel's Tavern, 602 North Highland Avenue Northeast, Atlanta, GA 30307.

Fourteen attendees included Fellowship of Reason® members and three wonderful visitors. We began promptly at 3:30 p.m. after meeting, greeting, and eating. We finished, as promised, at 5 p.m. and stayed around another hour just to chat.

Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind*

We called everyone's attention to Jonathan Haidt's new book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012). A long-time FOR member, whose book club recently read this book, suggested the book as a fantastic resource for our project: "Does Reason Work?" And, indeed, it is.

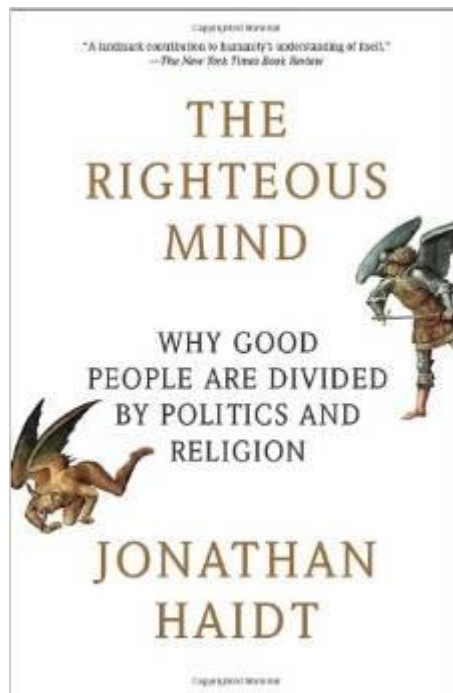
Professor Haidt tells us that there are six evolutionarily derived moral modules: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation, authority/subversion, and liberty/oppression. People vary in the intensity of the

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activation of these moral modules. Some groups, for example, are little influenced by the sanctity/degradation module. Progressives, for example, are highly motivated by the care/harm module to the exclusion of others. These differences, according to Haidt, account for differences among groups of people on moral issues.

We hope that everyone will read Professor Haidt's book prior to our next meeting.



Haidt uses the metaphor of an elephant and its rider to explain how people “reason.” The elephant represents our automatic, instantaneous emotional reactions to a situation. We see, for example, a baby seal being clubbed to death as a part of a hunt. Our care/harm moral module is immediately activated. Our reaction is emotional/visceral. We are horrified. Our rider immediately begins making up “reasons” why the clubbing of the baby seal is immoral and imagining laws to ban it.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) famously wrote: “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.” Professor Haidt calls himself a Humean. So, for Hume and for Haidt (partially), reason does not work in a way that we might have anticipated or hoped. Professor Haidt does believe that reason in groups (like scientists working, experimenting, and publishing on a question as worldwide colleagues) can move toward the truth. Professor Haidt believes in the Scientific Method.

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
P.O. Box 28891
Atlanta, Georgia 30358
(770) 471-9800

E-mail
info@fellowshipofreason.com

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Haidt uses another metaphor of a lawyer and his client. A lawyer takes the client's facts and instructions and constructs a case to defend his client's position. The client represents our automatic, instantaneous emotional reactions to a situation. The lawyer represents our "reason" whose function it is to support and defend the client's position.

During our meeting, we suggested that Haidt's six moral modules might be helpful in conducting our experiment "Does Reason Work?"

Brainstorming for Topics

Next, we brainstormed for topics. Here is our list: global warming, minimum wage, war with ISIS, "You didn't build that!", vaccine safety, limitations on free speech, the war on drugs, immigration, same sex marriage, systemic racism and white privilege, creationism, regime change (other countries by the CIA), political correctness, impediments to reason.

The original plan had been to find a topic with strong opinions on each side of the issue, divide the group into the two factions, and have each faction devise a strategy to persuade the other faction. This plan was not approved by the group. The main objection being that we should look for information and evidence first before taking positions and planning attack and defense.

The topic we chose was the minimum wage. Our assignment for next time is to find articles, information, and evidence that might have a bearing on the topic. Our hope was to share some of the material before the meeting and come prepared to present.

As an incentive, the group will vote on the best presenter/presentation following the next meeting. The winner will receive a \$25.00 gift card from Amazon.com.

What did we learn?

1. Not everyone wants to participate. One audience member asked "Is there room for audience?" Of course, the answer was a resounding "Yes!" We always need audience in the Fellowship of Reason®.
2. The meaning of the word "reason" was not clear. The intention of the activity is to determine whether one person can change the heart and mind of another using all legitimate tools available to a persuader. We recall the novel *nineteen eighty-four* by George Orwell. In the novel, the protagonist Winston Smith is "persuaded" to believe in "Big Brother" by torture (the ultimate torture being, for Smith, a caged rat strapped to his

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face). According to the novel, Winston Smith's heart and mind are *actually* changed. Torture is not in our "legitimate" tool kit.

3. We disallowed sophistry as a "legitimate" tool in our last essay. Some (perhaps jokingly) protested. By banning sophistry, no particular persuasive technique is outlawed. We intend that participants in the argument be sincere in the positions that they advocate and not merely act as "lawyers" arguing a case with which they may or may not agree. This suggestion, though, was in conflict with another provocative suggestion during our session and that was to collect evidence and argue for the side one does not agree with in order to avoid forcibly (self-inflicted force) confirmation bias.
4. The event almost failed to achieve agreement on a topic. Lack of leadership is a suspected origin. The meeting proceeded as a participatory democracy. Within 15 minutes of the end of the activity, we were at an impasse. We had failed to choose a topic. Several of our issues are poorly suited as debate topics. For example, the topic of limitations on free speech was without opposing parties. Our group is ultimately united on the question of free speech. We all agree that screaming "Fire!" in a crowded theater is not "Free Speech." On the other side of the issue, we all agree that *Charlie Hebdo* ought to be free to publish their cartoons without fear of assassination and the campus speech codes are a violation of the Second Amendment.
5. Our philosophy tapes course reminds us of Aristotle's view. Aristotle says: "And in general, feeling seems to yield not to reasoned speech but to force. So it is necessary for a character to be present in advance that is in some way appropriate for virtue, loving what is beautiful and scorning what is shameful. But it is difficult to hit upon a right training toward virtue from youth when one has not been brought up under laws of that sort, for living temperately and with endurance is not pleasant to most people, and especially not to the young." Emphasis supplied. *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle, Joe Sachs, translator, 1179b28, p. 197.

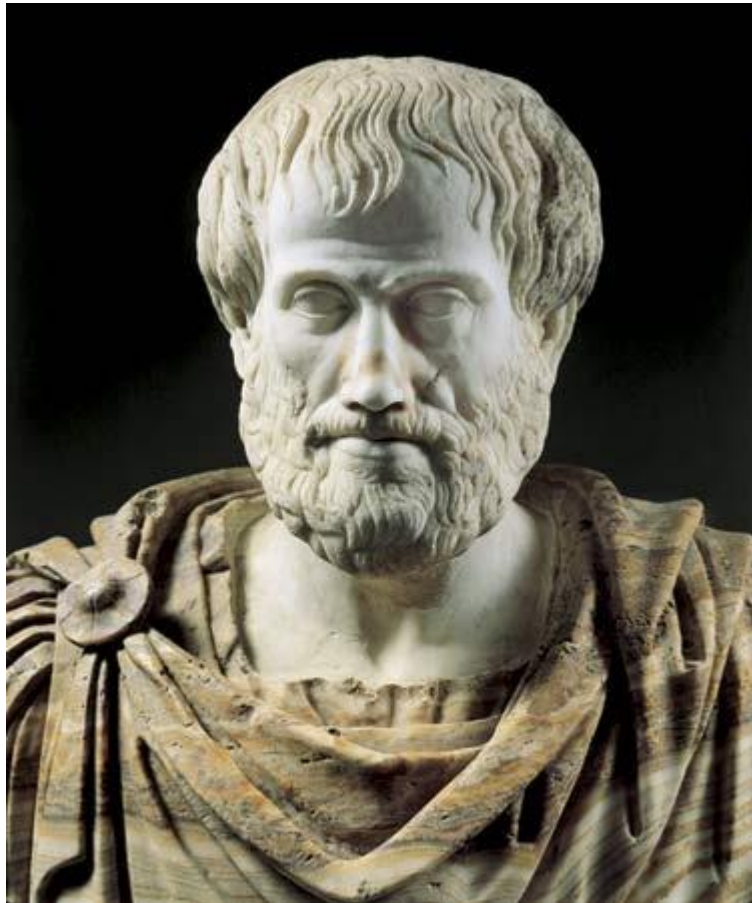
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Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700



Conclusion

“Feeling seems to yield not to reasoned speech,” says Aristotle. Our question, “Does Reason Work”, it seems, is not new. Are we to despair?

We are not ready to declare failure yet. We are after all, still, the Fellowship of Reason®. Let us soldier on.

Collect some articles, information, and facts on the issue of the Minimum Wage. Let us meet on March 7, 2015, at 3 p.m. in the Eagle’s Nest of Manuel’s Tavern and see what happens.

We will reason together.

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

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

The Elephant in the Room

By Martin L. Cowen III

In this essay, we will explore one use of Jonathan Haidt's new book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012). Professor Haidt tells us that there are six evolutionarily derived moral modules: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation, authority/subversion, and liberty/oppression. Perhaps, if we locate these moral modules in ourselves, we can enact the Oracle at Delphi's injunction to "Know Thyself."

Know thyself
ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ
γνώθι σεαυτόν
gamma nu omega theta iota / sigma epsilon alpha upsilon tau omicron nu
Transliterated: gnothi seafton

A α alpha	N ν nu
B β beta	Ξ ξ ksi
Γ γ gamma	Ο ο omicron
Δ δ delta	Π π pi
Ε ε epsilon	Ρ ρ rho
Ζ ζ zeta	Σ σς sigma
Η η eta	Τ τ tau
Θ θ theta	Υ υ upsilon
Ι ι iota	Φ φ phi
Κ κ kappa	Χ χ chi
Λ λ lambda	Ψ ψ psi
Μ μ mu	Ω ω omega

In Latin: *Nosce te ipsum*

Or, in Latin (from the 1999 film *The Matrix*): *Temet nosce*

If we "know ourselves," we can reason better with friends.

Professor Haidt uses the metaphor of an elephant and its rider to explain how people "reason." The elephant represents our automatic, instantaneous emotional reactions to a situation. We see, for example, a baby seal being clubbed to death as a part of a hunt. Our care/harm moral module is immediately activated. Our reaction is emotional/visceral. We are horrified. Our rider immediately begins making up "reasons" why the clubbing of the baby seal is immoral and imagining laws to ban the practice.

Sanctity/degradation

In this essay, let us only consider the sanctity/degradation moral module. If we can identify that which we ourselves count as sacred (of highest importance to us) then we will "know ourselves."

Before talking about our sacred beings (people or gods), entities (sacred books or objects), or ideas, let us admit that if "our" sacred being is **identified**, then we might be offended, from the start. A sacred object is not to be touched. A sacred object is not to be discussed. A sacred object occupies a sacred space within us. Our sacred object is nobody else's business. When another person names or identifies our "sacred object" as a sacred object, the object is, by the act of identification, degraded. We **dare** to talk about an individual's Sacred Center from a "higher" perspective. However, for that individual, there is no "higher" perspective than his Sacred Center. For the individual nothing is more important for him than his Sacred Center, nothing **is** higher, for him.

For example, Fellowship of Reason® member, Ms. X, holds Science as her sacred object. For a person whose sacred object is Science (notice the capital "S"), Science is the highest and greatest idea. To "classify" Sacred Science from a "higher" perspective is sacrilege. Now, the person for whom Science is sacred may only feel a twinge of resentment upon the naming of her Sacred Science. Even though **just a twinge** of resentment is experienced, that resentment is there.

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

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Notice that "Sacred Science" is an elephant (an emotional center). The rider (reason which is the servant of the emotional elephant) immediately starts defending his elephant. "Science is beyond the domain of emotion." "Science is more exacting the philosophy." A clever rider might spend his career in defense of this elephant, Sacred Science. For those readers for whom Science is Sacred, a little present introspection will hopefully reveal the truth of the hypothesis just given (you feel a twinge of resentment at the identification and are preparing defenses).

This phenomenon is familiar in the religious realm. The Jewish people take the name of God very seriously. The name must only be written and spoken with the utmost respect. Orthodox Jews write God as "G_d." The religion of Islam takes the Prophet Mohammad so seriously that images of the Prophet are forbidden. The publication of images of the Prophet can evoke horrendous consequences as recent history amply demonstrates. Christians take the name of God very seriously. See the Ten Commandments as the most obvious example. Also see, Exodus 3:14: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." God's name is "I AM," He who is not to be named?

The naming of our Sacred Centers, beings, objects or ideas, is a sensitive matter. We intend no disrespect to anyone's Sacred Centers, beings, objects, or ideas, by naming them here.

Our point is simply to suggest that each of us ought to identify our Sacred Centers, beings, objects or ideas, in order to better understand ourselves. Know thyself.

ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ

For one or more of our members Science is sacred. For those of us who are parents, our Children are sacred. One's Parent or Parents can be sacred. For some, Libertarians particularly, Freedom is sacred. For some, Freedom of Speech (yours truly) is sacred. For some, Secularism is sacred. This last, Sacred Secularism, is interesting. The New Atheists (e.g. Sam Harris) are people for whom their lack of or freedom from the religious impulse is extremely important. The Sacred is closely associated with the religious. When a New Atheist is asked, "What is sacred to you?" he might well say, "Nothing is sacred to me." Or "I am very suspicious of the sacred." Even for a New Atheist we can be certain that **something** is *extremely important* to them, even though they may prefer to avoid the word "sacred." So be it.

For almost everyone we imagine, his/her honor and reputation are Sacred Centers.

For some Objectivists Ayn Rand is a Sacred Being. No criticism is permitted of Ms. Rand. For some Liberals, Obama is Sacred. Former mayor of New York City, Ruddy Giuliani, is currently under extreme criticism for heresy, having said: "I do not believe, and I know this is a horrible thing to say, but I do not believe that the President loves America." (We hesitate even to write the foregoing because Mayor Giuliani's words are truly heretical in today's America.) For Muslims, The Prophet Muhammad is Sacred. (We hesitate to say these words for fear of a *fatwa* being declared on us. Truly: no disrespect intended.) For some, Jesus is Sacred. (We do not have to worry about the Christians. Christians do not do terror or *Jihad*.) For some, the Unborn Child (possible victim of abortion) is Sacred. (Note that the drafting of the foregoing sentence is problematical. Consider the connotation of the sentence in this form: "For some the unborn fetus (possible subject of a pregnancy termination procedure) is Sacred." Words are loaded!)

Consider the phrase "mock up." When one creates a "mock up," one creates an image or model of the thing. The verb "to mock" can mean simply to imitate or to mimic: "You are mocking (imitating) me." The verb "to mock" has a negative connotation, meaning to "make fun of" or "to degrade." Therefore, the "conceptualization" Sacred Being is the creation of an image or a "mock up" of the particular Sacred Being. The imaging or modeling of the particular Sacred Being by categorizing it with a concept like "Sacred Being" can be easily associated with "making fun of" or "degrading" the Sacred Center.

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Repeating: That is not our intention.

We are on delicate ground, talking about the Sacred. Nevertheless, we are wise to identify in ourselves our Sacred Centers (beings, objects or ideas). We can use this knowledge to moderate our behavior, if our "reason" thinks moderation might be appropriate. We started the list with Science as Sacred Center, because those individuals who hold Science Sacred are most likely to withhold (or moderate) their fire upon experiencing the twinge of resentment at the apparent, though not intended, "degradation" of their Sacred Center by naming.

What are your Sacred Centers? Your own Honor and Reputation, Ayn Rand, Obama, Mohammad, Jesus, Science, your Children, Freedom, Free Speech, the Unborn Child, Philosophy (previously unnamed). There have to be dozens of possibilities.

The violation of a person's Sacred Center is serious business. Such a violation can be the source of group schisms (or individual schisms). For many members of the Fellowship of Reason® our deceased member Vera Norman (born January 14, 1940—died April 18, 2011) was a Sacred being. Not everyone who loved Vera would use the word "Sacred," but many of our members loved Vera. She came to our group by invitation to speak of her escape as a Jewish toddler from the Nazis. Vera's story is amazing, but one detail sticks out. Vera, as a very young child, was fleeing the Nazis with her brother. As they approached a crowded border, Vera remembers hearing shouting and experiencing general turmoil. Vera was separated from her brother and lost from him forever. The brother's fate is unknown in the specifics, but the assumption is that he was killed by the Nazis. Vera escaped, somehow, to Belgium where she lived as a "Catholic" orphan in a convent. Both of Vera's parents died in Nazi concentration camps. Vera remembered running to the fields adjacent to the Convent during bombing raids in order not to be in the buildings when they collapsed from the bombing. Ultimately, Vera came to the United States, learned she was Jewish, and became the extraordinarily kind, generous, and wise person that she was. Vera's story activates the Care/Harm moral module described by Jonathan Haidt in his book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012). Vera will always be, for some, that little child, lost in the crowd, hunted by Nazis. A Sacred Child to be protected with one's very life!

On the other hand, Vera had some sharp edges and a sharp tongue. She was not an Objectivist. In our group, two factions developed: the pro-Vera group and the anti-Vera group. It is an exaggeration and an oversimplification, but we had Vera Norman versus Ayn Rand as competing Sacred Centers. The two factions split. Vera died.

Sacred Centers are important.

In future essays, we will explore the other moral modules. Remember the six are: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation, authority/subversion, and liberty/oppression. Knowing which of these modules are particularly active in us and the details of the activating circumstances is useful information for relating with others.

In the meantime:

ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ



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

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 1, 2015
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

P.O. Box 28891
Atlanta, Georgia 30358

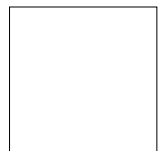
E-mail

info@fellowshipofreason.com

A Reason-Based Moral
Community

FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.

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