



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON®

March 2015, Vol. 17 No. 3

The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

Martin Cowen, Editor

Officers:

Mandy Bauer, President
Claire Gloeckner, Vice President
Susan Menich, Treasurer
Susan Menich, Secretary

Board of Trustees:

Martin Cowen
Claire Gloeckner
Ron Menich
Frank Vickers
Larry Woods

Individual Highlights

The Elephant Whisperer	1
Events	9
Birthdays	9
Celebratory Announcements	10

The Elephant Whisperer

(This is how reason works)

By Martin L. Cowen III

“A person cannot change his own elephants. Why would he want to?” This essay will explain this claim.

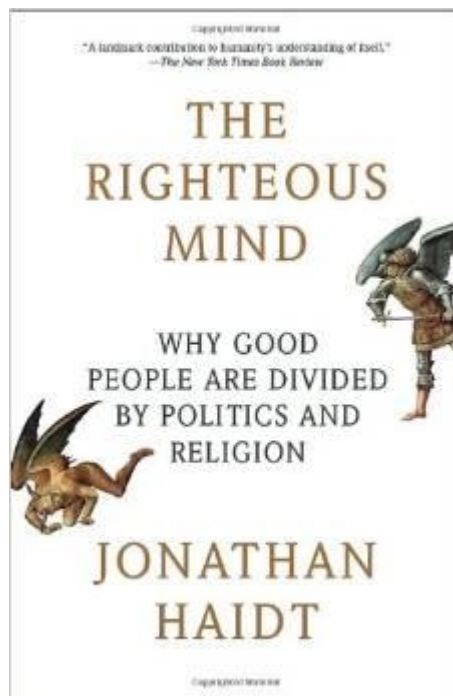
The context for this essay is our two-months-long project: “Does Reason Work?” As the Fellowship of **Reason**® we have a more than passing interest in the question. We are enjoying a series of meetings to address the question. At our first meeting, we brainstormed for issues about which people have differing opinions to discover an interesting issue to resolve among ourselves using reason. We identified a topic. Our next meeting we will discuss strategies to resolve the issue. Our goal is to change the hearts and minds of one or more participants. Our first effort is to collect facts and other information that might have a bearing on the issue. Once we learn some facts about the issue, then we will determine how to proceed to a resolution of the issue. We want to determine whether, in a single case—one issue, one changed mind—whether, in fact, reason can work.

A member suggested that a new book, *The Righteous Mind*, might have bearing on our efforts.

This essay continues our work with the ideas of Jonathan Haidt from his 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. These moral modules are emotional centers that are, on the whole and for the most part, permanently set (after reaching stable adulthood) in each of us and very difficult, if not impossible, to change.

The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 1)



Haidt calls himself a Humean. The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) famously claimed: “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.” David Hume’s skeptical view is rather lamentable for a person who hopes to change the hearts and minds of others from error to the truth. (A skeptic would have put *truth* in quotes thus: “truth.” A skeptic blithely states: “It is True that there is no “Truth.”) Jonathan Haidt, who is not as skeptical as David Hume, holds out hope that science, as an institution, can, using reason, move people toward the truth.

David Hume (1711-1776)



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

The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 2)

Haidt has two useful metaphors. The first metaphor: Our emotions are like an elephant whose rider is reason. The rider's influence over the elephant is very limited. The second metaphor: Our emotions are like the client of a lawyer. The lawyer represents reason. The lawyer (reason) can advise the client (emotions), but in the end, the client (who is the boss) can do as he wishes despite the lawyer's advice.

Reflective people who have experienced low blood sugar can appreciate the power of emotion (chemical processes analogous or identical to emotions) over reason. During a period of low blood sugar, one can experience anxiety. The feeling of anxiety might be attached to an otherwise meaningless event. The brain can connect the feeling of anxiety and the meaningless event in a cause/effect way. Reason can assure the person to a 100% certainty that there is no relation, yet the anxiety remains and the sense of a causal relationship between the anxiety and the meaningless event remains. Only the passage of time and the restoration of normal blood sugar (by eating) will cure the anxiety and the false sense of cause/effect relation between the anxiety and the meaningless event.

While scientific progress and history move human beings toward the truth, members of the Fellowship of Reason® might be impatient with the pace of change. Even science has huge problems with change within a single generation. A common idea regarding scientific "paradigm shift" is that when a new theory is discovered the believers in the old system do not usually change their views, rather the "old believers" die out and the believers in the new system live on. After the "old believers" are dead and gone, the paradigm shift is complete. Examples of paradigm shift include the change from the geocentric view (the earth is the center of the solar system) to the heliocentric view (the sun is the center of the solar system); the change from the Newtonian view of physics to the Einsteinium view of physics; and the change from the Einsteinium view of physics to the quantum view of physics.

On January 12, 2015, National Public Radio performed a great segment on Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis (1818-1865). In his book *Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever* (1861), he explains that hand washing in hospitals can save lives. Doctor Semmelweis was a baby-delivery doctor in Vienna. He was alarmed by the mortality rate of birthing women at the hospital and the different outcomes in the clinic attended by doctors versus the clinic attended by midwives. The doctors were killing five times as many women as the midwives. Doctor Semmelweis conducted a number of scientific experiments to determine the cause. He tested for whether laying on the side or on the back was a cause. He tested whether the ringing of a bell by the passing priest was a cause. Finally, he determined the cause: doctors were performing autopsies of deceased women and then delivering babies and that the midwives were not. The doctors were not sterilizing their hands between the autopsies and

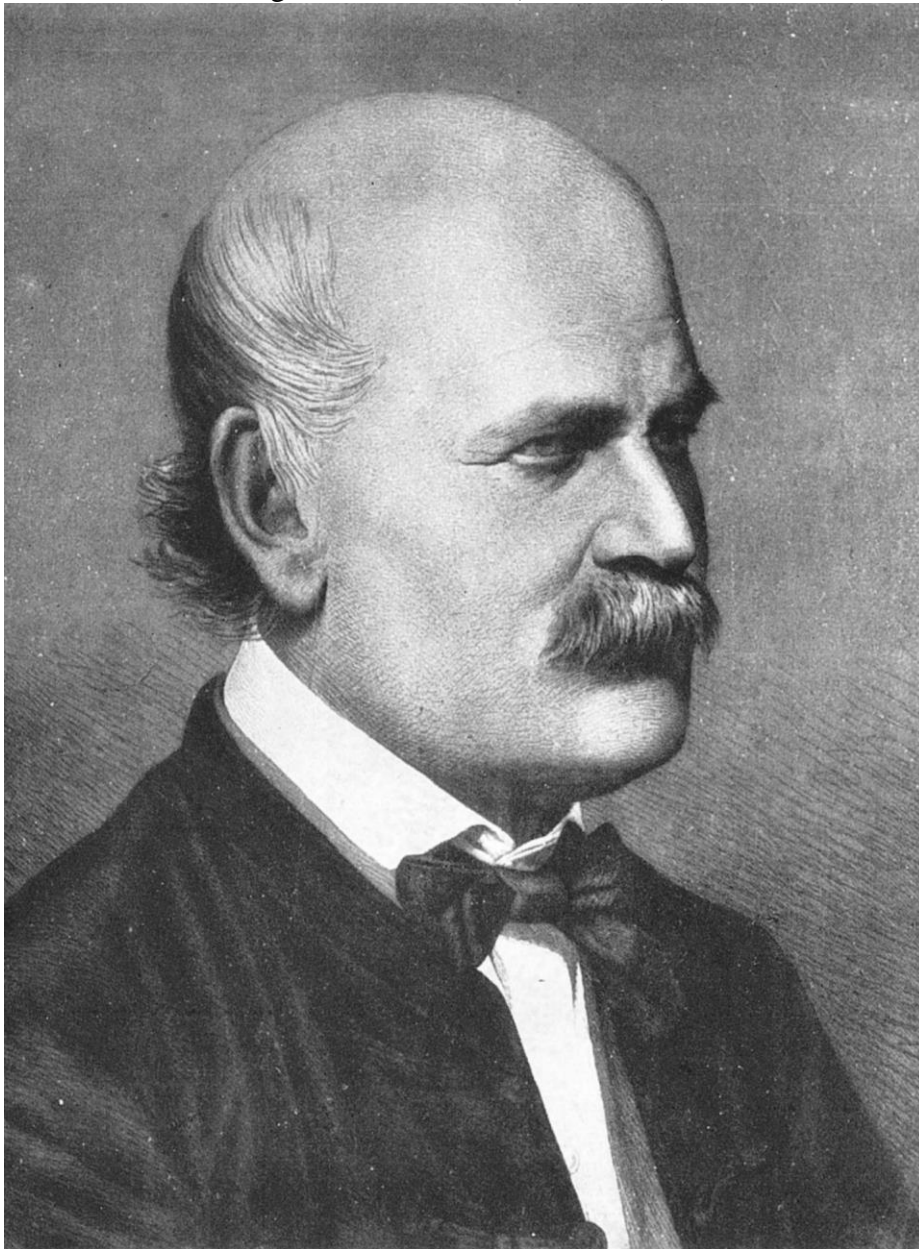
The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 3)

the births. Doctor Semmelweis (knowing nothing about germ theory) chose chlorine to clean the hands. Eureka! Childbed fever decreased dramatically.

Doctor Semmelweis' colleagues were not happy. The theory made it look like the doctors were causing the deaths of their patients (as in fact they were). A Sacred Center for doctors is: "I save lives!" Doctor Semmelweis lost his job and doctors gave up chlorine hand washing. Semmelweis was committed to a mental asylum and died at age 47.

Ignaz Semmelweis (1818-1865)



The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 4)

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

Even today, the struggle to ensure hand washing in hospitals goes on. (Anyone who has been in a hospital will have seen the signs encouraging the medical professionals to wash their hands.)

We hold science and scientists (and doctors) in the highest esteem. The point of these stories about paradigm shift, though, is to lament the fact that scientists (and doctors) are human beings, “all too human.”

In the previous essay, we used the Sacred Center of Science as our first example of Sacred Centers precisely because scientists (and doctors), who hold most explicitly to rational thought as a guide, would be least likely to be offended by the suggestion that Science is a Sacred Center. (We will recall that the prior essay suggested that we all might “Know Thyself” better if we identified our Sacred Centers. Sacred Centers activate the sanctity/degradation moral module. Other Sacred Centers identified were Children, Parents, Secularism, Jesus, Mohammad, Obama, the individual’s Honor and Reputation, Philosophy, Ayn Rand, and Vera Norman. There are certainly many Sacred Centers. We claimed in the prior essay that our Sacred Centers are the largest elephants in the room, always to be treated with respect and great deference, on pain of serious, even deadly, consequences.) Combining the skepticism of David Hume and our faith in science, tempered by the problems cited above concerning paradigm shift (it takes generations), is there any hope for the impatient among us that reason might work in a matter of years, rather than having to wait for the “old believers” to die out? That is the question this essay hopes to answer.

There is a song lyric (*Omina Sol* by Z. Randall Stroope) that indicates the widespread acceptance of the importance of emotions/passions:

Let courage be your oar,
Let passion be your sail,
Wisdom and truth will guide
Your deep heart’s yearning,
Through all travail.

We began this essay by claiming: “A person cannot change his own elephants.” And by asking: “Why would he want to?”

Now we can understand this claim. It means that an individual cannot change his own Sacred Centers or any of his other moral modules. (As a reminder the moral modules are: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation, authority/subversion, and liberty/oppression.) The reason is the rhetorical second sentence: “Why would he want to?” There must be passion/emotion in order to initiate action in the individual. A person’s elephants *are* his passions/emotions. Unless there is another elephant with a competing passion/emotion, there can be no change of the first elephant. Change can only come from outside an already emotionally stable individual, i.e. an adult whose ideas are well integrated, an

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about
Fellowship of Reason call:

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

The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 5)

adult who does not harbor competing elephants, an adult who has all his elephants in a row.

That, then, is our job as would-be changers of hearts and minds. We must avoid offending existing elephants and begin to build new elephants in the person whose heart and mind we hope to change.

Doctor Semmelweis offended the elephants of others. NPR explained that Doctor Semmelweis was not tactful. He publicly berated people. He made influential enemies. Doctor Semmelweis' downfall provides immediate guidance for us would-be changers of hearts and minds.



The secular movement called Brights is a great example of what not to do, if we are to avoid the mistakes of Doctor Semmelweis. Do not offend your correspondent. "I am *bright* (i.e. smart, intelligence, perspicacious) and you are not," is not an effective way to begin a persuasive argument.



Those Libertarian candidates who begin their campaigns with "Legalize Drugs" are not likely to go very far. While it is a consequence of the Libertarian philosophy of individual freedom and responsibility that people should be free to make even self-injurious choices and take personal responsibility for the consequences, it is not with the uncomfortable consequences of Freedom with which the argument *for* Freedom should begin. To do so gives a traditionally civilized person the impression that he is dealing with a wide-eyed crazy person.

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

The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 6)

Atheists who protest Prayer Breakfasts by local government bodies are a little more difficult to analyze. In the realm of politics (“a civilized substitute for war”), “giving offense” may be necessary and appropriate. We all oppose the creation of a Caliphate or any Theocracy that will dictate our personal, social, and civil lives (assuming the Religion being established by the State is not our own). Traditional Americans, who love the First Amendment (Freedom of Religion), support a general separation of Church and State even when the Religion being “separated” from the State is their own. We must separate out two approaches to the problem of separation of church and state. The first approach is persuasion. Changing the hearts and minds of the individuals who attend a Prayer Breakfast will not be accomplished by protests. On the other hand, stopping them from attending (without persuading them that as a government official their behavior might be inconsistent with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution) *can* be accomplished by political force. Political force can be mobilized by protests. In this essay, we are not interested in force. We are talking about changing hearts and minds. Force as a technique is illegitimate for our purposes. We are seeking to change hearts and minds by use of reason.

Therefore, our first rule is: Do not offend other peoples’ elephants. Avoid this at all costs.

Our friend tells the story of how he changed from being a Liberal to a Libertarian. In college, our friend was a committed Socialist. After college, our friend got a job with a person who was a Libertarian. Over time, by example and conversation, our friend’s conversion from Liberal to Libertarian was completed. It is a banality that many people in college are communists or socialists and that after they get out into the real world and get a job they become more conservative or libertarian. Of course, this outcome is not true for everyone.

We know of our friend’s conversion in only the broadest of outlines, but some behavioral guidelines emerge from the outline.

The change occurred from the outside. Our friend had a new boss. Every employee cares about her boss, at least as the provider the employee’s livelihood with whom good relations must be maintained or perhaps even as a friend. We have examples of this from speeches within our Fellowship of Reason®. One of our beloved members is a healthcare professional and she is intimately familiar with the problems that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) “ObamaCare” was designed to solve. She has given three very well received Oratories on healthcare matters. The talks were carefully researched, well delivered, and fact based. The views among our members about Obamacare are varied. Given confirmation bias (the tendency to interpret, to seek out or to retain information supporting one’s view), some of us might not have “heard” the information communicated in the absence of our love for the speaker.

Our second rule: Establish good relations with our correspondents.

The Elephant Whisperer: This is how reason works

(continued from page 7)

Wicked, the Broadway musical that premiered in 2003, presents a radically different perspective on the moral landscape of the classic 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Familiarity with the 1939 movie is essential to an appreciation of the musical. For those who know the 1939 film, we cannot imagine that Glinda, the Good Witch, is anything other than perfectly good. We cannot imagine that the Wicked Witch of the West (Elphaba in the musical, named after *Oz* originator/author L. Frank Baum) is anything other than perfectly evil. In two and a half magical hours, the musical *Wicked*, completely changes our classical view. *Wicked* is an emotional masterpiece.

Of course, the *Oz* stories are fantasy and changing hearts and minds about fiction can only be used as a metaphor for changing hearts and minds about real-world ideas. But, by analogy, one might conclude that changing hearts and minds, following the example of *Wicked*, is accomplished by emotional storytelling, using beautiful songs, dialog, acting, costumes, and sets.

When persuading, *Wicked* further instructs by example: we ought not draw conclusions. Rather, we ought to let the conclusions draw themselves. *Wicked* never says that Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, is a sympathetic character and morally good. *Wicked* tells a beautiful, emotion-laden story and the audience is permitted to draw their conclusions. The audience is unanimous in its conclusion as is shown by the success of the play—over 11 years running, 4,722 Broadway showings, 9 worldwide touring companies, seen by millions of patrons.

Our third rule: Persuasion begins with well-told personal, factual stories. Let our correspondents draw their own conclusions.

In conclusion, our three rules, drawn from our knowledge of elephants, are these:

- Our first rule: Do not offend other peoples' elephants. Avoid this at all costs.
- Our second rule: Establish good relations with our correspondents.
- Our third rule: Persuasion begins with well-told, factual stories. Let our correspondents draw their own conclusions.

The project of persuasion is a years-long process of avoiding offending our correspondents, establishing good relationships with our correspondents, and sharing fact-based stories with our correspondents, while allowing our correspondent to draw her own conclusions.

It is precisely within a moral community—Fellowship of Reason®—that this years-long project can occur.

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**

**April 5, 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

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

- April 9 Kathleen Allen
- April 9 Erik Bauer
- April 9 Kate Miller
- April 19 Leah Mickens
- April 24 Peter Brookner
- April 24 Susan Menich
- April 29 DeAnn Campbell

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

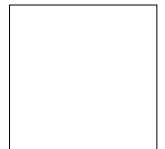
info@fellowshipofreason.com

A Reason-Based Moral
Community



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.

P.O. Box 28891
Atlanta, Georgia 30358



We are on the Web!

See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com