



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON®

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The official newsletter of  
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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## 200<sup>th</sup> Consecutive FORum

By Frank Vickers

While I can't comment on the intentions of Mandy or Kate or Claire, or any of the other better-half-type presenters who stand up here with some regularity, I think it a fair assumption that most of us guys get up here to *some* small degree with the intention of impressing the chicks—or in some cases the beefcake, we don't want to leave anyone out. "Some small degree" is likely about as much impression as we accomplish - maybe we should do push-ups and engage in smack-down contests.

But a risk you as the audience take is that we never know what we're going to get up here, since the Oratory is "unfiltered," and not prescreened. It may be a case of "careful what you ask for." I actually volunteered. And the risk for the presenter here—and as always with me - is that with some of the things I'll say this may be the presentation that finally renders me radioactive to cupcake and beefcake alike.

We talk a lot in here about beauty and St Thomas Aquinas' ideal trinity of requirements for it: *Integritas*, *Proportio* and *Claritas*. Or sometimes you'll google up *Integritas*, *Cosonantia* and *Claritas* (already things are getting complicated). These translate as "wholeness, proportion and radiance," or as other translations would have it, "wholeness, symmetry and radiance," or "wholeness, harmony and radiance." (Complicated). Let's stick with that last one, it seems the most popular, most common, we've been using that version here, and it's the one James Joyce uses. And he knows a lot more than I do. "Wholeness, harmony and radiance." We want everything to be perfect, easy and clear.

We also talk a lot about Aristotle's word, *Eudaimonia*: Flourishing. We want to live a good life. Not *the* good life, like mere hedonists, but a good life. We put a lot of effort into defining what that is, and it is an ongoing and probably endless project. We attempt to use the Thomistic standard of beauty as a way to recognize it. But then we get to definitions again and things get complicated.

The problem is—and I'm not going spend a lot of time defending this idea, in fact not any—that even with what we think are settled definitions, a good life—a worthwhile life—is not perfect, easy and clear.

What I want to do today is provide you with a challenge for the next 200 months of FORum. I want you to make make this more complicated. I want you to help try to define beauty, help try to define the eudaimonious good life, help try to define wholeness, harmony and radiance. I want you to push each other. And I want to see some of those efforts up here.

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Toward that end, I'm going to give you a little primer—not primer, that's the grey stuff that goes under the paint on a car—a primer on how to do this.

Here's how the magic works. You do an outline and then add a few adverbs and a bunch of adjectives and you've got what you want, 'cuz everybody knows everything they think about everything all the time already. Done! Perfect. Easy. Clear.

Except I never do that.

Here's how the magic really works. At least for me. First, write out a few paragraphs, then move them around, assemble and build it like a mosaic from these modular chunks. See how it feels. Perhaps ironically, remembering that this is a thing to be performed in time rather than looked at on the page, the structure for me may be spatial rather than temporal. I work on it almost like I'd work on a painting, which, interestingly enough when you look at one, you take it in almost all at once. Paradox. Complication.

You're eventually going to have to smooth out the marriage of form and content and it's going to involve a lot of rephrasing and reallocation. With this method you end up with a lot of extraneous material you'll have to excise. A lot of flotsam gets jettisoned. You've got to add the connective tissue and do cosmetic surgery, blend the mosaic chunks and puzzle pieces, you've got to sweat. Maybe it's not so magical.

I try to work on it all together while finding out what I and it are all about. That's what I learned from mid-20th century Jazz artists and post-World-War-Two Abstract Expressionist painters. When I start out, I don't have it all planned out, in advance, in my head. I don't know what I'm going to do. I improvise with a small host of vague notions.

Then somewhere in there you've got to decide on a topic. Coming up with the subject matter, and probably a title, before you finish seems like a good idea. Subject matter is sometimes an excuse to exercise your use of form, and sometimes the form is only an excuse to broadcast your content. But the ideal marriage of form and content might be moot if the only real theme underlying everything is sex and death, the marriage of torment and the ticking of the clock.

It's supposed to be the other way, isn't it? You know everything you're gonna say and you say it, the way it's supposed to be said. It's like the perfection of an overture. You hear it and then you think, "It's all in there! Mozart's a divinely inspired genius! The whole opera sprang from that overture! He saw it all in advance!"

Well, nuh-uh. Because there's the probably-not-apocryphal story of Mozart rushing out the ink-wet overture pages to an impatient copyist - the last part of the score delivered—on the day of the premier of *La Clemenza di Tito*, in 1791, the last year of a too-short, but flourishing and highly productive life. This story adverted me to the fact that this overture-last method of producing these gems was his custom, and this made sense to me. The overture is constructed from parts of the rest of the opera, and then seems to foreshadow what is

### 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."



Mozart  
(1756-1791)

### 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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Percy Bysshe Shelley  
(1792-1822)

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## 200<sup>th</sup> Consecutive FORum

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coming. And that is the way I construct these presentations, minus the ensuing drama. The opera is all beforehand, in the construction, and this, the equivalent of the overture, stands by itself.

Some more tips:

Start early, you're going to have to get away from it for a while and be able to look at it fresh.

It also helps to have a magic pen. [scratch] Die, bad metaphor, die!

If you're not confident in having your own personal style, pick one. Pick a couple of styles. Anything from the flowing efflorescent verbosity of Percy Bysshe Shelley, to the staccato of Ernie Hemingway. Imitate somebody until you find your own tone of voice.

Get up and walk around when you're working. Long stretches at a desk or computer are bad for your health! Don't you read the papers? You'll be surprised what comes, and what getting the blood flowing with a walk around the block will do for you. Also, it's gonna reach a point where you've got to get some of that coffee out of your system before you jitter into shards.

Be obsessive. Carry a notebook while you're gone. The embers of inspiration are fleeting, Shelley says. Here's how he put it in the lengthy essay, "A Defense of Poetry": "blah blah blah, divinity, blah blah blah." Just kidding of course. He wrote,

"[T]he mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results: but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet."

He writes kinda nice, don't he? That's two sentences from Shelley. "Poetry is indeed something divine," he says a page or twenty earlier, still in the same paragraph. Mmmm, Divinity ... makes me think of cake.

I'm not out of sympathy with Shelley's declaration that plenty gets lost. Writing this, I lost a possibly great phrase in the time it took to cross the street outside, heading straight to my desk. But remember how Mozart assembled the thing you actually hear.

Time yourself up here. Six pages! not nine, like that behemoth Leonard Cohen speech delivered two years ago. ... Not that anyone one noticed that I ran six minutes over.

Oh, and a favorite trick that keeps these things ticking: Always have some sort of reference to doo-doo. ... See? It worked!

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Once you've got your chunks approaching wholeness, harmony and radiance, it will be time to practice, practice, practice, but I also find that reading parts of it out during construction helps me come up with the blossoms, gems and jewels I'll need as I go on. You can't rewrite and polish and correct until you write badly in the first place, and sometimes doing - and admitting - that is the hardest part. It's like practicing a song while composing. Why not do that with this?

So we've started to get most of your structure in place. (I ... hope that helped). It's time to shift into what we might call the *inspiration part*, which should run concurrent with ... whatever I said back here on page 2 ... I know, I know, the inspiration is supposed to come first, right? Though where it comes *from* is still a mystery. And, once again, Shelley says the best of it will fade before it begins. Keep that notebook. I find it coming in and waning, in successive waves during the writing and recital, pulling some kind of linguistic music through your piece, with changes in tone and timbre, and just enough repetition of theme to create a cycle of associations, as you procure variations from the palette of instrumental colors.

If you want a "simple" formula, model everything on the style of the rises, falls, and rises - the majors and minors - of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, or the antic mania of an episode of Monty Python's Flying Circus. Risk splicing your models together. Not each of us is a Cole Porter, but even if you fall short, you will have shot far enough to land further and brighter than you might have.

Take your jump-cut associations, constructed piecemeal, over time at different times rather than in a straight line, and tease out themes from a single nugget, fashion settings for the little clusters of word-jewels. One fragrant little verbal fragment can lead to a daisy-chain of paragraphs that can cure the ills afflicting you and your project. Orchestrate, and be up to the challenge of going back over and over it and molding it. Weave, lace, ramble and condense, ramble and condense, distill, distill, distill.

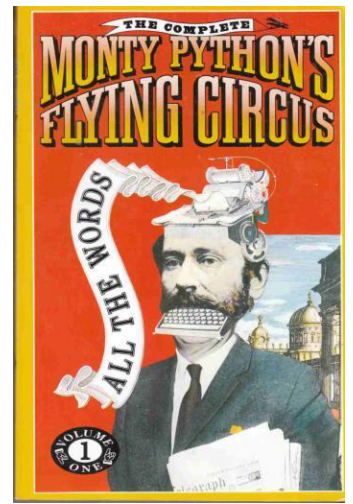
Be slightly obsessive, "What can I use? What can I use?" hopefully catching and keeping the original thought and the way it's phrased, because the way it's phrased is fraught with connotations and rhythm, and soon it will start blossoming like young love, before the pitfalls that don't take seven years to start itching. Because sometimes you do have to change it ...

You start out looking for the so-called oceanic experience, the total immersion, the wholeness, harmony and radiance - and the high - of falling in love, but the sweet torture of early infatuation ends, then the chemicals in your system wind down and wear off in a couple of metaphorical years, and you'd damned well better be friends. Get cozy with the thing. You're going to be spending some time together.

Then you have to calm down and settle for the reality and it turns out like it turns out. Like in real life, there's a lesson I have to keep relearning, that I have to accept making changes and risk the cutting-room floor getting littered with glittering prizes. Writing to your own standards can be, sometimes, something that intense, and also that exhausting. I can't count the times I've said, "This was



Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)



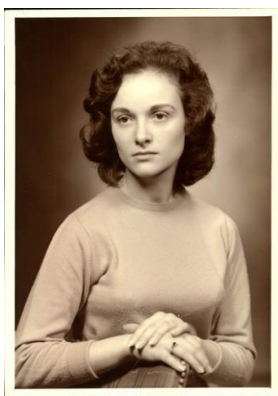
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**Regular membership:**  
\$35 per year

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

**Lifetime membership:**  
\$700



Vera Gottfried Norman  
January 18, 1940-  
April 18, 2011

not what I wanted." It never turns out like planned. It's not for everyone. And not for anyone with a weak stomach, this divine sausage-making. It can be hard work, and, this one almost killed me.

It's curious. It's interesting, our obsession with wholeness, harmony and radiance, interesting that we love that, given Aquinas was a highly influential and revered religious figure, and yet a figure worth studying, for us secular folk. Goes to show that we risk throwing out the figurative baby with the religious bathwater. Think what we'd lose, if we didn't ramble and condense through St Thomas in our search for flourishing. Never getting to the new confluence of ideas, always stepping in the same river twice.

Speaking of influential religious figures, those of you who have been here long enough remember Vera Norman, and may even sense her hovering over the proceedings (Hi, Vera!) Vera might be a test case on whether any of this is worthwhile, in part because many of us knew her, in part because many of us did not know her. Vera did as much as anyone to make FOR whatever it is today. She threw herself into it. Like I'm sure you folks will, she gave numerous presentations, and her complications had far-reaching repercussions. She made a big splash, it's well known. She lives on through deeds *un-known*. Decreasingly visible, Vera is nonetheless a big part of the milestone we're celebrating today.

It was Vera who *gently suggested*, in the way Vera Norman gently suggested anything - "buttonholed" me is more like it - suggested that I participate. I'd had a germ of an idea for an oratory tucked away in a corner of my imagination, but never really thought I'd have the nerve, never really thought I'd get up here and do this. I dusted it off, decided to jump in, I worked long and hard and started learning the hard way, and the first of many doo-doo jokes Vera got for her effort - some debut - the infamous "Green Squares and Bags of Poop" talk, seems to have gone okay.

I remember afterward she dashed around the backs of the chairs at the old UU meeting place to hug me and declare, "That was WONDERFUL!!!" I uncharacteristically nuzzled her shoulder, I'll admit like an infant, and thought, "If I have pleased Vera, I need please no one else ever again."

I've been doing this on-and-off for a dozen years, now, and apparently turned in one or two decent performances since. Lately it's like I won't shut up. Surely more than two or three of you have in your secret, coveting hearts a germ of an idea to dust off like the one Vera inspired me to do. Who will it be, finding yourself up here doing something you never really thought you'd do? *Some* of you will flourish up here, taking the risk that it comes crashing into decline and shadow, chasing the beauty, chasing the flourishing, chasing the high. When will you get another chance to do this? The light doesn't stay green forever. It doesn't stay on forever.

Are you the kind of person who never forgets a face? How could you, with the constant reappearance of the same names and faces and voices up here? A lot of time has passed since January 2003, when Vera nudged me like I want you to nudge each other - and most important - push yourselves. FOR has stayed vital. Vera's action churned the water, and now a different river and still a different river, or occasionally something else, has been stepped in much more than twice.

### 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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Would she say it was worth encouraging new voices to participate? Would those of us who never met Vera think it is worth it, knowing, as she surely did, that you, too, will one day be remembered for a few deeds, when it doesn't really last, and then to live on through deeds unknown? I like to think she had few regrets over her contributions. And we are surely benefitting from them today.

She didn't live to see recent projects like the "Does Reason Work?" symposium come stuttering to a halt in only its second episode. Among other things, one of Claire's oratories was abandoned for unhappy reasons. One of Martin's was interrupted in an untimely fashion - and just as he mentioned my name! Vera might have made great comic hay out of some of these. We've gotten to see the endless friendly competition between Larry and Martin sparring on the meaning of beauty - where are the push-ups, guys? We've seen repeated doses of Mandy's existential angst, we've had regular exposures to Kate's chemical reactions, and recurrent instantiations of Claire's cogent analyses. Good as they are, are we to settle for these? In 2003, or even half a decade ago, had we reached our limit?

We're in the midst of life in all its raging idiot glory, with no shortage of "supposed-to-have-been." There's all kinds of stuff to write about, from how foolishness and wisdom seem to have only a limited correlation with intelligence level, to how we need to get through each little patch of hap-hap-happiness before letting things get back to normal. We could pull from a list of light-and-dark, major-and-minor contrasts too long to bore everybody with. It's somewhere, on a page dropped from this. I think I remember something about finding the perfect blend of passion and restraint - or was it sincerity and irony? We could write about how real life can never be a love song, and the happy-ever has no after. We could write about how sometimes you have to settle for making it work. And in a case of "careful what I ask for," we could write about anything at all! just so long as we take over up here and relieve our bumbling hero, your humble correspondent, from immersing himself in the "oceanic" experience of putting together an oratory, so he can devote more free time to the disappointments of searching for the perfect cupcake.

Are you searching for wholeness, harmony and radiance? Are you hoping for things to be perfect, easy and clear? Because we're in the *radioactive* part, now, if I haven't long already put myself there: The sooner you people realize there is no hope, the happier you'll be! Stop demanding the arrival of wholeness, harmony and radiance. Stop expecting perfection, ease and clarity to come to you. Create some. Get up off it and sweat the magic into existence. Risk it, because when it works it's a high. Time is running out and the *tock*, my friends, is *clicking* faster than Shelley's inspiration. Your challenge for the next 200 months - your assignment - is to make this complicated. Make this worthwhile. Join us up here at this podium. Take your turn at the magic and dry, dull work of searching for the poetry, searching for the melody, searching for the wholeness, harmony and radiance.

Get up here! Don't make me come down there and get you! like Vera did, me. The clock is ticking.

Thank you.

*The sooner you people realize there is no hope, the happier you'll be! Stop demanding the arrival of wholeness, harmony and radiance. Stop expecting perfection, ease and clarity to come to you. Create some. Get up off it and sweat the magic into existence.*

## 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. 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:** 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

**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

**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. to adult beverages and fun.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

**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: last Tuesday of every other month at 7:30 p.m. Potluck**

Members and friends of FOR are invited to attend a 4-years-long study group of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. We meet at Sally's house in May, July, September 2015. When done we will have spent 3 years and 10 months in this study.

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

Martin Cowen coordinator: 678-641-9321

## Birthdays

June 22	Chris Snider
June 29	Allison Byrd

July 23	Christy Blanchford
July 25	David Van Mersbergen
July 26	Steve Whiteman
July 29	Ben Bradley
July 31	Linda Cowen

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

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

**July 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.

## Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

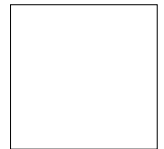
Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON<sup>®</sup>

**FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.**

P.O. Box 28891  
Atlanta, Georgia 30358



**Fellowship of Reason**

P.O. Box 28891  
Atlanta, Georgia 30358

**E-mail**

[info@fellowshipofreason.com](mailto:info@fellowshipofreason.com)

A Reason-Based Moral  
Community

**We are on the Web!**

See us at:

[fellowshipofreason.com](http://fellowshipofreason.com)