



The official newsletter of
Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

Martin Cowen, Editor

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Do the Humanities Need Protection?

By Martin Cowen

Oratory delivered at FORum 10-1-17

Last month I performed an oratory entitled: *What is the Mission of the Fellowship of Reason?* I concluded by saying that "Our mission is to preserve the humanities, to keep our love of the humanities alive, to inspire in others a love for humanities and to bring them among us, and to enact a humane way of life."

I received a grade of 90% from Ron Menich on the grounds that I had omitted the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology) from my proposed zone of protection. Today, I am appealing my grade.

Allow me to quote from a favorite book on the subject of the death of the humanities.

Natural science is doing just fine. Living alone, but happily, running along like a well-wound clock, successful and useful as ever. There have been great things lately, physicist with their black holes and biologists with their genetic code. Its objects and methods are agreed upon. It offers exciting lives to persons of very high intelligence and provides immeasurable benefits to mankind at large. Our way of life is utterly dependent on the natural scientists, and they have more than fulfilled their every promise.

You should all walk with us on Sundays at FOR Runners. We have the opportunity to discuss interesting subjects. On a recent Sunday walk around Chandler Park and the Jimmy Carter Center our little group including Ron and me talked about whether science is at risk.

I would like to mention that I have no cynicism about or critique of science per se. Any cynicism or critique I have is directed is at some of the human beings who are or who claim to be scientists. Scientists are *Human, All Too Human* after the title of Friedrich Nietzsche's 1878 book. Scientists succumb to office politics and social, political, cultural, and corporate pressure like all of us.

Domains of Knowledge

I would like to divide up university education into three big categories: the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. I would like to add two other categories: the first is the tools that apply to all the domains of knowledge and the second is the professions. Generally, the professions are post-graduate studies, though undergraduate electives would point to the professions.

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Do the Humanities Need Protection?

The three big categories divide up the world by what they study. The natural sciences study physical bodies. The humanities study the human mind/consciousness/spirit whatever you want to call it. The social sciences study relationships among individual minds.

The Humanities

The humanities consist of, on the whole and for the most part, these subjects:

- Arts and music (Music is part of the Quadrivium)
- Classics and literature in general
- Language and history
- Philosophy and religion

The humanities are interested in these questions:

- What is it to be human? (What is Man?)
- What am I?
- Where have I come from?
- Who am I?
- What ought I to do?

The Social Sciences

The social sciences consist of, on the whole and for the most part, these subjects:

- Anthropology
- Sociology
- Political science
- Economics

The social sciences are interested in this question:

- What are the ways in which individual minds interact in groups?

The Natural Sciences

The natural sciences consist of, on the whole and for the most part, these subjects:

- Physics
- Chemistry
- Biology
- Astronomy (part of the Quadrivium)
- Earth science (geology, geography, meteorology, oceanography, etc.)

The natural sciences are interested in these questions?

- What is?
- What is the nature of what is, of bodies, of the physical universe?

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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Science has Limits

During my research for this oratory I found an interesting web page.

http://undsci.berkeley.edu/article/0_0_0/whatis-science_12

The page is entitled: *Science has limits: A few things that science does not do.*

- Science doesn't make moral judgments
- Science doesn't make aesthetic judgments
- Science doesn't tell you how to use scientific knowledge
- Science doesn't draw conclusions about supernatural explanations

This list will be useful shortly.

The Toolbox

The toolbox that applies to all of these knowledge domains consists, on the whole and for the most part, these subjects:

- Grammar (part of the Trivium)
- Logic (part of the Trivium)
- Rhetoric (reading, writing, speaking) (part of the Trivium)
- Mathematics (Arithmetic and Geometry are part of the Quadrivium)

The toolbox is concerned with cognition and communication. All the domains require the tools to acquire and communicate knowledge.

The Professions

The professions consist of, on the whole and for the most part, these subjects:

- Medicine (many subfields)
- Law
- Accounting
- Psychology
- Engineering (many subfields)

Methods of Inquiry

The Experimental Method

The natural sciences differ from the humanities and the social sciences in the method of inquiry. The natural sciences can use as a method of inquiry the experimental method also called the scientific method. Experiments are used in the natural sciences to verify a hypothesis. An experiment tries to hold all other factors constant while varying one factor to determine whether that one factor is causal. To be deemed valid experiments must be repeatable. The results must stand up to logical analysis. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an early advocate of the experimental method.

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The humanities cannot as effectively use the experimental method. Holding human factors constant as required by the experimental method is almost impossible with human beings. Another problem is that “the subjects have minds of their own.” A third reason why the experimental method is difficult or impossible in human studies is ethics. Human beings have rights.

The famous Milgram experiment of the early 1960s at Yale is an example of an ethically questionable experiment. Everybody probably remembers these studies during which the subjects were directed to apply electrical shocks to actors. The subjects did not know that their victims were actors and that electrical shocks were not actually being administered. Sixty-five percent of the subjects followed their instructions and administered “lethal” electrical shocks to the actors. Some of the subjects of the experiment suffered extreme emotional distress as a result of their participation in the study. Subsequent evaluations of the tests suggested that some of the subjects may have realized that the entire project was a ruse.

The Milgram experiments exemplify both objections to human experimentation (moral and practical).

Observation as Method

The social sciences use observation as their method of inquiry.

Introspection, Observation, Ratiocination

The humanities use introspection, observation, and ratiocination as their methods of inquiry.

Consequences of Differing Methods

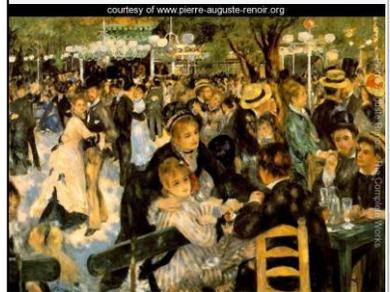
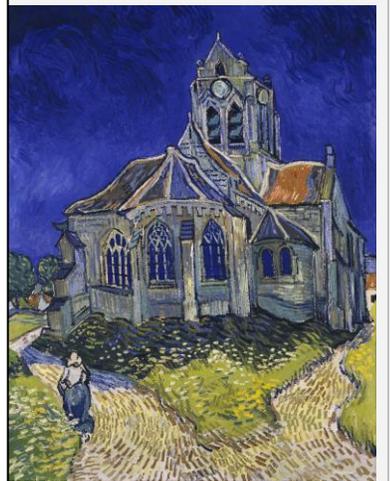
As consequence of the differences in method of inquiry among the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, people often refer to physics, chemistry, and biology as hard science because the natural sciences can use the experimental method.

It is the “hardness” of the natural sciences that is among the reasons that the natural sciences need no protection from the Fellowship of Reason or others.

Confirmation Bias

On Sunday during FOR Runners it was suggested that I have a theory—the alleged attack on humanities—in search of evidence. It was suggested that I might be guilty of confirmation bias. One difference between the members of the Fellowship of Reason and some other people in the world is that we are aware that human beings are susceptible to confirmation bias. Most people, on the whole and for the most part, do not even know the meaning of the phrase.

Everyone is subject to confirmation bias and everyone practices it. Only some scientists, in the narrow domain of their focus, actually try to do the



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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

opposite. Karl Popper (1902-1994) famously said that a theory is scientific if, and only if, it is falsifiable. So, a true scientist, Karl Popper might say, looks for ways to disprove his theory. A true scientist has a disconfirmation bias.

I agree that confirmation bias is to be avoided. Being aware of the issue is half of the solution. I am aware of the issue.

Source Material for Hypothesis

I am not the only one to believe that the humanities are dead or dying.

My quotation at the beginning of this short oratory is from the world famous 1987 book by Allan Bloom *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. I reread part of this book in preparation for this oratory.

Another great book that I reread for today's oratory is Victor Davis Hanson's 1998 book *Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom*.

I also reread Fareed Zakaria's 2015 book *In Defense of a Liberal Education*.

And finally I read for the first time, Stephen R.C. Hicks book *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*.

I recite my preparatory reading in support of my claim that I am trying to avoid confirmation bias. I have as a reason for my hypothesis these four great books published from 1987 to 2015. However, as someone will surely note, I have not read all books on the subject of the state of the humanities. True. In addition, someone might note that I have not read any books on the subject of the current health of the humanities. True. I am aware of none. My only answer is that I have done some work on the subject and if you are interested in refuting my argument you might look for the book that defends the current state of humanities education, if such a book exists.

Why Do Humanities Need Protection?

So then, why do Bloom, Hanson, Zakaria, and Hicks think that the humanities need defending? Why does Martin Cowen think that the humanities need defending?

Natural Sciences are Hard

Let us look back at the natural sciences. The natural sciences are called hard sciences. Their results are tested and proven by the experimental method. If a skeptic were to say to a scientist in broad daylight at the beach, there is no sunshine, the scientist would consider the skeptic a fool or demented. The scientist reacts similarly when a well-tested theory is doubted by a skeptic. Scientific results have created fabulous technologies that we all use. When we use the technologies of science, by our actions

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we make clear that we believe in science and technology despite what we may say.

So everyone, on the whole and for the most part, believes in science and technology.

Science has Limits

Remember my list of the limits of science.

- Science doesn't make moral judgments
- Science doesn't make aesthetic judgments
- Science doesn't tell you how to use scientific knowledge
- Science doesn't draw conclusions about supernatural explanations

Herein lies the key. The natural sciences have these stated limits. To some extent these limits apply to the social sciences. The cultural relativism of sociology and anthropology are famous and completely consistent with the amorality and nonjudgmentalism of the natural sciences. Even the social science economics as I am teaching it claims to be morally neutral, refraining from condemning Marxism or praising Capitalism. Austrian Economics nonjudgmentally analyzes the logical outcomes of following various economic policies. Austrian economists simply say: "Yes, people will die under Marxism. Yes, people will flourish under Capitalism. Take your pick." The Austrian economist *qua* economist does not care.

The Humanities Provide Bases for Human Moral Action

Not so the humanities. The humanities are the resources for overcoming the stated and agreed limits of science. History has lessons to teach. Religion and philosophy have moral lessons to teach. Classics and literature and art and music necessarily make aesthetic judgments simply by the works remembered and taught.

- The humanities do provide the basis for making moral judgments
- The humanities do provide the basis for making aesthetic judgments
- The humanities do provide a basis for deciding how to use scientific knowledge
- The humanities do provide a basis for drawing conclusions about supernatural explanations

People care deeply about moral judgments, aesthetic judgments, how to use scientific knowledge, and whether God exists.

The humanities are where the moral action is. One might say the humanities are where human action is.

The Evidence

The evidence of the attack on the humanities is stated in the books that I have cited and I will give a few examples shortly. But first, let us identify the culprit.

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The enemy of the humanities is postmodernism. Postmodernism is a dead-end philosophy 200 years in the making from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and Richard Rorty (1931-2007).

The motive of the postmodern attack upon the humanities is political. If one immerses oneself in the humanities certain conclusions seem to follow. Simply look at the monuments of Western Civilization: Periclean Athens, Republican Rome, Renaissance Italy, the Dutch Golden Age, the British Industrial Revolution, and America. For the opposite of humanistic results read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Postmodernists do not like the conclusions humanists sometimes reach, like:

- Reality exists
- Human minds have contact with reality and can communicate with others about it
- Individualism is good
- Liberal democracy is good
- Art and music have standards

In order to reach their political goals, postmodernists must destroy the humanities. Claude Lévi-Strauss says in his *The Savage Mind* (1966), p. 247: "I believe the ultimate goal of the human sciences [what we are calling the humanities] to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man." Quoted from Hicks's book, page 195.

Postmodernists argue that "all truth is relative" (but postmodernism is true), all cultures are equal (except for the West), "values are subjective" (except those values postmodernists promote), "technology is bad and destructive" (but "it is unfair that some" have more than others), and "tolerance is good and dominance is bad" except when postmodernists are in power and political correctness rules. Modelled after Hicks's formulation on page 184 of his book.

The postmodernist attack goes to the heart of reason by asserting that human minds are impotent and logic and evidence do not matter. Postmodernists are particular enemies of the tools, the cognitive and communicative tools, grammar, logic, rhetoric (reading, writing, and speaking).

We saw some of this in our short lived visit with Analytic Philosophy in tapes in which language was analyzed using algebraic-like equations.

The evidence provided in the books cited comes in the form of many quotations from the destroyers of the humanities. One quote follows. Please note that understanding the paragraph is not the goal of quoting it. The goal is to demonstrate the incomprehensibility of postmodernist thought about the Classics.

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*I find it difficult rhetorically to lay out the ways in which Foucault's work has mattered to me without acknowledging the fragments, disparate, split nature of my sense of self, a self-produced in late capitalism, with gender, class, all those markers that locate one tenuously and ambiguously in the world. All of these affect the encounter with the great man. I am a psychoanalytic female subject, an academic, a Marxist historicist feminist classicist, split, gender-troubled, in the midst of a book about Sappho. And I realize as I write that I could not have written this book without Michel Foucault. So how can that be? I have to take these various elements of whom I think myself to me, and look at them in relation to the work of Foucault. (Page Dubos, *Sappho is Burning* [Chicago, 1995, p. 147]. Quoted from Victor Davis Hanson's book, page 96, cited above.*

Conclusion

I have declared that the Fellowship of Reason loves science. I have suggested that all scientists are human beings and are subject to office politics and social, cultural, corporate, and political pressures. I have suggested that all human beings are susceptible to confirmation bias. I have suggested that being aware of the possibility of confirmation bias is half the battle to overcome confirmation bias. I have claimed that the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences study three domains of knowledge. The humanities study the human mind. The social sciences study the relationships among minds. The natural sciences study bodies.

The natural sciences are not at risk because they are hard and use the experimental method. The humanities are at risk because the results are disputable and because the humanities attempt to answer moral questions and aesthetic judgments.

The enemies of the humanities are the postmodernists whose motives are political.

We can and should ignore and shun the postmodernists like the scientist ignores and shuns the fool who in broad daylight denies the existence of the day. In fact, we must ignore the postmodernist because he cannot be reasoned with on his own terms. [Foucault (1978) said: "Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy." Quoted from Hicks's book page 187.]

Instead, we must simply execute our mission:

Our mission is to preserve the humanities, to keep our love of the humanities alive, to inspire in others a love for humanities and to bring them among us, and to enact a humane way of life.

Why preserve the humanities? Because we love life and the humanities provide the keys to flourishing on earth.

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.

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. 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

It is Greek to Me: Every Saturday 9 a.m. 2018

Founder Martin Cowen proposes to lead an elite group of members and friends of FOR on a years-long journey to learn the ancient Greek language. The activity will be open to everyone including interested adults, college students, and high school students. Language learning is difficult and learning ancient Greek is very difficult. Weekly lessons and daily practice will be required for success. The course will be free, but participants will have to purchase their own textbooks.

Martin Cowen, Coordinator: 678-641-9321

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

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

**November 5,
2017**

Sunday 11 a.m.
(Meet, Greet at 10:30 a.m.)

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

Birthdays

October 20	Larry Woods
October 21	David Ziebell
October 26	Brandon Bartlett
October 26	Ron Menich
October 31	Martin Cowen

November 2	Mary Ampola
November 12	Randy Sekeres

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

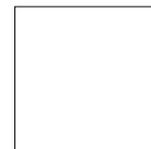
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