

The EUDAIMONIST

"What is the beautiful thing to do?"



FELLOWSHIP OF REASON®

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Fellowship of Reason, Inc.

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Elbow Grease

By Ronald P. Menich

Short Speech delivered at FORum 7-1-18

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Susan, Ira, and I, along with some other members of Susan's family, returned yesterday from a wonderful cruise to Nova Scotia. Susan and I viewed four shows during our time onboard. On Thursday evening there was a spectacular one performed by *Duo Quintessence*, a soon-to-be husband and wife acrobatics team. The two displayed incredible feats of strength, flexibility, and grace, both on the ground and in the air.

Afterwards, the two entertainers were in the hallway and I stopped to thank them for their performance and asked them how many hours per day or week they practice. They said that during the period of time when they are constructing a new show that they need to dedicate huge amounts of intense practice time. Then comes a period of time during which they need to spend several hours per day training the technical and lighting crews, and they need to perform their moves to achieve this, albeit not all at once. Then comes performance day when they warm up and then do two one-hour performances with an hour gap in-between. Then the day after performance, they do nothing and just spend the day recovering. It would be an understatement to say that they had to apply a lot of elbow grease to move from initial concept to performance, and to continue to do so.

It is impressive what humans can achieve when they apply large amounts of elbow grease or dedication to a specific activity. Every few years, the world marvels at the achievements of Olympic athletes at the summer or winter games. Olympic athletes spend massive numbers of hours preparing their bodies and minds to compete at a world-class level. Olympic competition is just the highest rung of competition, and the athletes compete in many, many competitions before they arrive at the Olympics.



Individual Highlights

"Elbow Grease" 1

Celebratory
Announcements 10

Elbow Grease

Several years ago I read *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008) by Malcom Gladwell, a book that popularized the phrase, “putting in your 10,000 hours” because one of the themes of the book is that it just takes time and effort to master a subject. It takes dedication and a conceptual 10,000 hours of deliberate practice or elbow grease application.

Perhaps a decade ago, Jim Ainsworth gave us a wonderful FORum Oratory in which he reviewed his own paper, *The Mundanity of Excellence*. The study showed that not just hours of training time, but also hours of excellent training time with constant attention to form and detail is what separates great athletes from mediocre ones.

We were totally inspired by Duo Quintessence’s performance. It was the essence of beauty (and recall that we have had many lectures in the last few years in FORum on beauty as a foundational concept for ethics).

But on the cruise I was, shall we say, less than inspired by the large number of obese people onboard, and also by the presence of a smaller number of exceedingly or morbidly obese people. On the first day of the cruise I saw two 300+-pound women seated at lunch talking loudly, and I noted in a short Facebook post that their extreme corpulence disgusted me. The response to my Facebook post was quick and highly negative from many angles, and the ensuing discussion was energetic, generating approximately one hundred comments back-and-forth. During this, I was called mean-spirited, ignorant, a bigot, insensitive, and other comments yet worse, the latter which I deleted. Perhaps you in the audience agree with me, or perhaps you agree with the negative responders to my post. I hope, however, that you will hear me first. FORum is a forum for discussing ideas, so at the risk of causing some further heat, I will continue to dig into one aspect of the discussion that caused such a stir in my Facebook post. If you disagree with me, then I fully expect you will let me know during the FORum portion of today’s meeting!



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Outliers



THE STORY OF SUCCESS

MALCOLM
GLADWELL

#1 bestselling author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*

About the name “The Eudaimonist”

A eudaimonist (pronounced "yoo-DIE-mon-ist") is one who believes that the highest ethical goal is individual happiness and personal well-being. The term derives from the ancient Greek word eudaimonia, which means, roughly, "well-being."

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the columns appearing in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily the views of the organization. The Fellowship of Reason, Inc speaks only through its Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws, and the actions taken by the Board of Trustees as a board and recorded in the minutes of the corporation.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc.**Mission Statement**

The Fellowship of Reason® is dedicated to the personal flourishing of our members through reason.

Fellowship of Reason, Inc. is a Georgia nonprofit corporation and a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation

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Elbow Grease

I will not regurgitate the entirety of the Facebook post and its responses, but rather focus on one of the central themes that arose in the responses, namely, that of personal choice or the lack thereof in the determination of a person's weight. Several responders argued that medical conditions could make a person obese, and listed a dozen or so maladies that could lead to weight gain. Another couple of responders mentioned food addictions, and one posted an article whose theme was that people do not choose to be obese. It is this issue of choice or the lack thereof that I wish to pursue further today.

I do not dispute that certain medical conditions or drugs are often *associated with* weight gain, and I personally know people who *have gained* large amounts of weight after inception of such a medical condition or after starting a drug regimen for a medical condition. In one instance, the person in question gained weight after a slipped disc. In another, the person gained weight after starting on a mental health medication. So I am certainly not ignorant of the fact that many people with certain medical conditions or who take prescription drugs do gain weight.

However, I do take issue with the statement a medical condition or drug made a person gain huge amounts of weight, because the word *made* seems to imply to me that the person in question had neither choice nor control in the matter. People do have choices as to what they ingest, and those who are at least a modicum of control over their bodies also have choices as to how much they move their bodies and exercise.

Before proceeding further, let me note that I consider myself to be 40 pounds overweight. In my 20s I was fully grown and weighed 50 pounds less than I do now, and so it is not too much of an exaggeration, methinks, to claim that I am 40 pounds overweight. Although I do some exercise and do some monitoring of my weight and have made some diet adjustments, these are not enough, and I remain overweight. I own my weight, and I am not blaming anyone else for what I weigh.

Losing weight or maintaining weight is tough, and it is yet even tougher—sometimes exceedingly tough—for people with certain medical conditions and for those who take certain drugs.

Elbow Grease

However, I do not consider the presence of such a medical condition to be the end of discussion with respect to weight management. Recently I viewed a video of a young girl with a prosthetic lower leg performing gymnastics. Several months ago, I viewed another inspirational video of a paraplegic performing incredible feats with just his arms, swinging around, doing pushups, performing tricks with his wheelchair, and so forth. The girl with the missing lower leg and the paraplegic certainly had medical conditions, but that did not stop them: they applied elbow grease to their problems. I will not claim that their medical conditions were the same as those faced by people who often experience weight gain after inception of their medical condition.

But as I looked at the flabby arms, and other characteristics of the exceedingly obese women mentioned in my Facebook post, I was very skeptical of the notion that they were merely helpless victims of some medical condition. It might be worth noting that there are 350-pound football players and sumo wrestlers who are in excellent shape, and that weight alone is not a fully reliable indicator of general health. It did not appear to me that the two women upon whom I commented in my post were at all akin to fit football linebackers. No, they were way out of shape.

Aesthetics.

From 2500 year old statues of Greek heroes and athletes to Michelangelo's David to the well-chiseled features of the dueling actors in the recent movie, *Black Panther*, the ideal of male beauty, of the ideal male physical specimen, has remained more or less unchanged over the ages: the ideal man is lean, muscular, athletic, fit.

Many of us middle-aged men fall far short of that ideal. But it is not a bad ideal, considering that the opposite of that, namely, out-of-shape corpulence, is bad for health. Obesity is linked to type II diabetes, heart disease, and many other maladies. The man who is out of shape and is 200 pounds overweight is likely to be sicker, to have higher healthcare costs, and to die sooner than were he to look like Michelangelo's David. The ideal of male physical beauty, difficult as it is to obtain, leads us towards life and health. Being 200 pounds overweight angles towards sickness and death.



Michelangelo's David

17th 1501-04, Florence, Italy

Elbow Grease

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700



Venus at the Mirror (1615)

Peter Paul Rubens
(1577-1640)

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about
Fellowship of Reason call:

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

The ideal of what constitutes and historically constituted the beautiful woman is far more complex than that of male physical beauty, and folk often point to artist Rubens' corpulent pictures. But in the last 50 years or so, increasingly unchained from the demands of housework and increasingly unbound from traditional roles, I would suggest that the ideal of female physical beauty has begun to converge towards that of ideal male physical beauty, that of slenderness, and perhaps also angling towards fitness. Pick up any woman's magazine in the last 50 years and you will not come away with the impression that Ruben's corpulence is in vogue today. Rather, the ideal of female physical beauty is slenderness.

And there is little doubt that that ideal of female slenderness causes a great deal of emotional pain for a large number of American women. We sang karaoke on the ship several nights on the cruise, and two songs often heard were, *All About that Bass* and *Baby's Got Back*, two songs that celebrate large women bottoms. These songs and the messages they contain resonate with large audiences of women who feel trapped, ashamed, or unable to control their weight or otherwise have a very negative reaction to the ideal of female physical beauty being slenderness.

Let me repeat what I said earlier: losing weight or maintaining weight is tough, and it is yet even tougher—sometimes exceedingly tough—for people with certain medical conditions and for those taking certain drugs. I get that. I also get that American women are frustrated with a slenderness ideal for female physical beauty that is so difficult to attain in a country filled with French fries, mobile phones, and so forth. To countermand the eating habits and sedentary lifestyle that are the norm in the United States requires dedication and constant attention. It is easier to spend that extra hour on the internet or watching Hulu rather than to spend that time exercising. It's easier to just keep eating what one has always eaten rather than, for example, adopting a ketogenic diet, eating smaller portion sizes, or adopting some other long-term diet change. And all of those arrows I shoot at myself, too—these are not merely comments about women, but self-reflections on what an excuse machine I can be with respect to my eating and exercise habits.

Although the calories-in/calories-out model for diet control is perhaps outmoded or misleading, it is not the case that our bodies

Elbow Grease

are magical. Our bodies silently record the results of our habits, and we can choose to eat differently, eat smaller portions, or otherwise adopt other better eating and exercise habits than the ones to which we have been accustomed. But it does take elbow grease to achieve that.

When a person says that they have tried everything to lose weight and nothing worked, or when a person claims that a medical condition or drug made them gain weight, I suggest that we should be a bit skeptical. Large populations in other countries or at other times have remained slim. Go on a trip abroad and you will find many countries in which the populations are far slimmer than ours. For example, the population of Japan was not starving and was much slimmer than Americans were two decades ago (and to a lesser extent, now as well). Having a medical condition might indeed make it much tougher to maintain or lose weight. Just being middle-aged makes it tougher to be slim than when young. But a person does have a choice as to how they deal with their age, their medical condition, and so forth, and they do have some control as to how obese they become, if at all.

Becoming 200 pounds overweight does not happen overnight. A person faces choices when they are just 50 pounds overweight. That person can choose to react to the situation and adjust eating and exercise habits, or not. A person continues to face choices when they are 100 pounds overweight. And so on. However, if a person ignores their weight problem for a sufficiently long period of time, then other problems such as diabetes can arise and complicate matters yet further. Being 200 pounds overweight is a clear and present danger to health, and there is urgency to correct the problem quickly before a downward health spiral ensues.

One commentator on my Facebook post dryly noted that the entire discussion was one of the existence of free will versus determinism. It can be very, very tough to lose weight, depending on one's background. But in between "very tough" and "impossible, I'm doomed, I have a medical condition" is the space in which freewill and heroes live. People nonetheless achieve many other tough things. Many smokers do finally quit, and it can be really tough to quitting smoking. Some alcoholics and drug addicts do completely recover and live alcohol- or drug-free lives thereafter, despite the fact that many fail. A paraplegic can develop upper-body strength on a



Elbow Grease

level way beyond that of almost all of the rest of the population. And Olympic athletes stun us with their achievements. Such people are heroes and they inspire us.

If you get a chance to see *Duo Quintessence*, I highly recommend that you do so. Their performance is perfection. Their bodies are physically beautiful because they are so fit. And they have employed lots of elbow grease to achieve what they have achieved: they are heroes who show the rest of us what it is possible to achieve with dedication.

If you happen to be overweight, I wish you the best and will cheer you along with respect to your weight management goals, if you choose to share those goals with us or with me.

Thank you.



The Fall of Phaeton (1604)
National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.
Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)

Elbow Grease



The Fall of Man (1628-29)
Located in the Prado, Madrid
Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)



Woman with a Mirror (1640)
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel
Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)



Peter Paul Rubens
Flemish Painter
(1577-1640)

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 Wednesday 7:30 p.m.

A Classics Professor leads an elite group of members and friends of FOR on a yearlong journey to learn the ancient Greek language. We have reached our capacity of 10 students. The event is closed to newcomers. Language learning is difficult and learning ancient Greek is **very** difficult. Weekly lessons and daily practice will be required for success. The course is free, but participants purchase their own textbooks.

Martin Cowen, Coordinator: 678-641-9321



Old Woman and Boy with Candles (1616-17)

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)

Birthdays

July 25 David Van Mersbergen
 July 29 Ben Bradley

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

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

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

**August 5, 2018
 Sunday 11 a.m.**
 (Meet, Greet at 10:30 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!



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Fellowship of Reason

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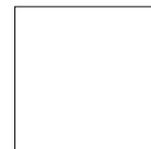
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A Reason-Based Moral
Community

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