

Mission Statement

The Fellowship of Reason® is an open, benevolent, and vital rational moral community in which we celebrate our lives, our freedoms, and our philosophy of reason. We study ethics.

Selfishness

As a parent of small children, I have little time for anything other than “my selfish interests,” understanding that my selfish interests include my wife and children. I know by inference that the other members of FOR who have small and medium-sized children are likewise utterly submerged in the job of parenting with little or no time to appear at FOR pot lucks or whatever.

While a telephone solicitor might well call me selfish when I hang up on the solicitation for his favorite charity, the word “selfish” would not be customarily used to describe my intense “family focus.”

Assuming that Bill Gates does or did work 80+ hours per week building Microsoft Corporation, we would not customarily describe his assiduous attention to his business as selfish.

The word “selfish” does have some uses for me. I would like to call some teenagers (usually 12-16 years of age) selfish. A little reflection, though, shows me that what I mean is that the “selfish” teenager has no interest in me or mine—hardly a moral fault. I suppose I think that these teenagers “ought” to have an interest in me by virtue of some long-standing relationship, usually familial.

I encountered a clerk in the grocery store the other day who was tapping on the wall to the beat of the background music of the store. It took some effort to get his surly attention and once received that attention was unpleasant. “Selfish” might loosely be applied to him. Since my complaint to management seemed to have resulted in his termination, his behavior had not actually advanced his “selfish” interests, unless he *wanted* to be fired.

Back to parenting, I would like to call parents who neglect their children “selfish.” Wealthy parents who send the children off to be raised by others might fall into this category. Parents who for trifling reasons destroy their families and traumatize their children do also.

Taking these four examples of so-called selfishness—ignoring charities, teenagers, surly clerk grocery clerks, and bad parents—I discern that “selfishness” has something to do with a lack of appropriate concern for others. What is “appropriate concern” and who are these “others”?

Given that our philosophy of reason is ego or self-centered—morality answers the question “how ought ‘I’ live in order to ‘personally’ flourish?”—equating morality with “other interest” fails from the start by definition.

The answer, it seems to me, from the perspective of our philosophy of reason, is that certain “others” are necessary to an individual’s flourishing. In ascending order of importance, the following “others” are necessary for flourishing in a modern society: potential trading partners (practically everyone), trading partners, friends, romantic partners, and children.

Children: I do not mean to say that everyone must have children, in fact I think the opposite is true. Only individuals who desperately desire children dare undertake the project because, in my opinion, it is *the* most difficult and longest range task commonly undertaken. Is there any other project that you can think of that is guaranteed to last for 21 years or more?

Once chosen, though, children are vitally important to our flourishing. Why? Because the choice to have children is the choice to create another human being. Our success or failure in the sacred task will impact our evaluation of ourselves—our self-esteem—for the rest of our lives. The external consequences of our success or failure will directly effect the child who we create and the hundreds of other people who come into contact with our creation over the 70 years of his or her life.

All creation, all production is motivated by the fundamental desire to manifest ourselves in reality. If our most important manifestation—our child—is a disaster, that disaster is us and we will know it! A parent's self-evaluation as a person is intimately connected with his or hers success or failure as a parent.

Parenting is a very serious undertaking, perhaps the most serious undertaking of life.

So having a "family focus" when we have children is indeed a most selfish activity, but contrary to the connotation of the word "selfish," a fundamentally moral activity.

To attend to our children, therefore, is essentially selfish and moral.

Romantic partners: Everyone needs, in my opinion, a romantic partner. I am not alone in that opinion, am I? A reason is that individuals need external mirrors of themselves. In order to experience oneself in the world, we need another person to reflect back to our own eyes the person that we are. The "other" needs to be a person of similar interests and tastes so that the reflection we receive is comprehensive and favorable. If our romantic partner has no eye for sports while we do, for example, an area of our lives will remain unreflected by that romantic partner. Such a compromise is, though, a cliché.

To attend to our romantic partner, therefore, is likewise essentially selfish and moral.

Friends: Everyone needs friends for the same reason that everyone needs a romantic partner. Romantic partners tend to reflect ourselves on highly intimate aspects—sexual, psychological, and other profoundly personal matters. Romantic partners share lifetime concerns and projects. Friends tend to reflect ourselves on less intimate aspects, a shared interest in sports for example, or philosophy, or movies, or continuing adult education.

To attend to our friends, therefore is likewise essentially selfish and moral.

Trading partners and potential trading partners: In a world based upon trade, as is the modern world, we must have trading partners in order to survive. Our employer is a trading partner. The individual trades his labor for the employer's pay check. Our

customers are trading partners. In order for others to want to deal with us, customers must be treated with respect and consideration.

To attend to our trading partners, therefore, is likewise essentially selfish and moral.

Accounting for negative selfishness: A charity has no moral right to disparage an individual who does not share an interest in the charity's cause. Everyone's tastes and interests are different. We cannot be interested in all good things, even 1% of all good things. Personally, I am thankful for those who are interested in the "Disease X Benefit Society." I can't afford to express my interest in Disease X, though, because I have a greater interest in Disease Y.

Considering "selfish" teenagers, teenagers are transitional children. They have a vital project during ages 12-16, individuation. Furthermore, their bodies are just introducing them to the joys and pains of sex, so naturally they don't have time for "others" other than their peers.

The surly grocery store clerk was not behaving selfishly because he was not pursuing his actual selfish interests: trading partners and customers. He was just behaving badly (in a manner not designed to ensure his personal flourishing). The consequences for him were that I shunned him and then his employer shunned him. He reduced his potential trading partners by one individual and one national company. His opportunities for flourishing have been reduced.

Bad parents are the saddest cases of all. Not only do they spread misery to their children and those who come into contact with that offspring for 70 years (and perhaps for generations to come), they diminish their own possibility for self-esteem, and therefore, for flourishing.

Selfishness, then, is for good reason not a philosophical concept. It is a fuzzy word used to imply a negative moral judgment. Since rational self-interest in personal flourishing is the standard of moral judgment, the word "selfish" is misleading.

Having an appropriate concern for others as defined above is an important virtue.

June Birthdays

Matthew—June 17

Chris Snider—June 22

Allison—June 29

July Birthdays

Eddie—July 1

David v M—July 25

Linda C—July 1

Celebration, July 6, 2003

Welcome—**Steve**

Celebration of Freedom—**Ellen**

Celebration of Visitors—

Celebration of Each Other—

Celebratory Announcements—

Celebration of Art—**David G.**

Celebration of Personal Mission—**Nick**

Celebration of Art—

Celebration of Talent—**David P.**

Oratory—**Steve**

Announcements—

Closing Quotation—

Philosophy Tapes

Philosophy tapes are played to a small private audience in the living room of a volunteer on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. The next playing is at Sally's house on Tuesday, July 1, 2003, at 7:30 p.m. Free.

Invisible College

Dr. Glenn Magee is lecturing every Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m. at Vera's Intellectual Salon. Price: \$60 per month. Call Vera at 404-577-7968 for more information.

The Philosophy Café

Attend Steve Stoke's Philosophy Café at Border's in Buckhead on the second Wednesday of every month at 8 p.m. and at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore in Duluth on the third Wednesday of every month at 8 p.m.

FOR's Pub Night

Members and friends of FOR, Inc. meet on the 4th Thursday of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation. FOR's next pub night is Thursday, July 24, 2003, at 8 p.m.

FOR's Potluck dinner

Our next monthly potluck is Saturday, July 20, 2003, at 7 p.m. at Sally's house. Please remember to bring something good to eat or drink.

FOR's Film Night

Members and friends of FOR, Inc. enjoy a monthly movie night at John's studio using his extraordinary equipment. FOR's next movie night is Saturday, July 5, 2003. Arrive at 6:30 p.m. Doors will be locked for safety! Movie starts at 7:15 p.m. Free.

A Philosophy Café

Attend Steve Lewis's philosophy café at Border's in Duluth on the first Wednesday of every month at 7 p.m.

Celebration Schedule

- **Sunday, July 6, 2003**
- Sunday, August 3, 2003
- Sunday, September 7, 2003
- Sunday, October 5, 2003
- Sunday, November 2, 2003
- Sunday, December 7, 2003
- Sunday, January 4, 2004
- Sunday, February 1, 2004
- Sunday, March 7, 2004
- Sunday, April 4, 2004
- Sunday, May 2, 2004
- Sunday, June 6, 2004
- Sunday, July 4, 2004

Membership Information:

FOR, Inc. has 49 members.

- Regular membership: \$35 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2003
- Contributing membership: \$70 per year if paid prior to October 31, 2003
- Lifetime membership: \$700 if paid prior to October 31, 2003

Contact information:

Visit us on the web at www.fellowshipofreason.com

To talk to somebody about FOR call Vera at 404-577-7968 or Martin at 770-471-9800 or Dan at 770-831-3010.

A subscription for 12 monthly issues of this newsletter is \$15 per year.

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

How can you help support the Fellowship of Reason, Inc., the world's first and only reason-based moral community?

If you would like to support our activities, including our building fund, please consider these opportunities:

1. Attend our activities
2. Bring donuts
3. Subscribe to our monthly newsletter
4. Perform at Celebration
5. Recruit a person of like-mind and values
6. Volunteer your home for a potluck or other activity
7. Become a regular member
8. Become a contributing member
9. Become a lifetime member
10. Donate cash, property, time, or expertise (FOR, Inc. is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation and donations are tax deductible.)
11. Locate and help us apply for a public or private grant
12. Make a testamentary gift

Make checks payable to Fellowship of Reason, Inc. and mail them to 8188 Pembroke Terrace, Jonesboro, GA 30236-4179. Use PayPal on the web at www.fellowshipofreason.com

To make a Last Will and Testament with a gift to FOR, Inc. contact your attorney. If you live in Georgia, Martin L. Cowen III, Attorney at Law, without charge, will prepare and supervise the execution (inside the perimeter or within 10 miles outside of I-285) of a simple will with a minimum unrestricted testamentary gift to FOR, Inc. of \$1,000. Call 770-471-9800 for more information. This offer may be withdrawn at any time without notice. Mr. Cowen, a licensed Georgia attorney, and not FOR, Inc., is solely responsible for any legal services rendered by him with or without charge.

Sponsors

**Members of FOR, Inc. are entitled to a 10%
labor discount at AutoStop.**

Thanks, Dan, from FOR, Inc.!
